

RECAPTURING OUR FUTURE: A  
GUIDE TO CHURCH  
RENEWAL

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **RECAPTURING OUR FUTURE: A GUIDE TO CHURCH RENEWAL**

by  
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#### **Mentors**

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Asbury United Methodist Church of Holly Springs, Mississippi is the context. The church is suffering from decline in membership and ministries. This thesis proposes a link between decline and the congregation departing from its outreach ministry of educational empowerment. The project proposes that Asbury can become an outward focused church by supporting the public schools in their effort to improve education. Quantitative research methods will be used to ask questions and collect feedback from the church and selected groups within the community. The teams will include congregation members, United Methodist Conference administrative staff, school administration, parents, students, and community groups.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I first would like to thank Dr. Vance Ross, who when I was never expecting to take on a project of this nature, found me at a meeting and encouraged me to do so. Now that this project is completed, I want to say thank you for your never ceasing to offer help and believing in me. Thanks to Dr. Roz Picardo, for your patience and encouragement through this process. I want to thank Dr. Joni Sancken for her wealth of knowledge and guidance in the preparation of this research.

To Asbury United Methodist Church of Holly Springs, Mississippi for the support and freedom to undertake such a project and allowing the time away to do so. I am appreciative to the professional and context associates, Dr. Gema Beckley, Dr. Ismael Edwards, and Dr. Alicia McCloud, for the painful ordeal of having to listen to me for the past three years. Thank you for your assistance which aided to the completion of this dissertation.

To my children, Candice, Erin, and Jonathan, who encourages and makes me smile every day. To my cohort, Dr. Lillian Smith and Dr. Rudy Rasmus, who started this journey with me and helped me to know the power of friendship and support. I will always be grateful to God for the intersection of our lives.

Finally, to Sharon my beautiful wife, who supported me when it got rough, and pushed me to go on. I am thankful for her faith in God and the hundreds of prayers that she offered which held me to the task. Thank you dear for not allow me to give up.

## **DEDICATION**

The dissertation is written in dedication to God, the Creator. God has never left us in any situation and has always made God's presence known in our lives. I am forever grateful for the love and strength God provides. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit" (Ps. 51:10-12).



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## **INTRODUCTION**

From the beginning of its existence, Asbury has contributed to the community of Holly Springs. It has served as a Methodist faith and has lived within the context of the denomination. The church developed and charted the first African American school, which led the way for a college that exists today. Its rich history has brought forth denominational leaders, advance degree persons, and professionals such as teachers, doctors, attorneys, and many more. For one hundred fifty-two years, it has maintained its belief in the God and salvation of Christ. The congregation had to be reminded of these attributes and encouraged to continue toward a future beyond their past and present successes.

This project examined ways in which Asbury and Cchurches like it may renew the original call of the congregation and begin a move toward a future that restores growth and community acceptance. There are several congregations within the Mississippi Annual Conference which are similar to Asbury's history, which can also benefit from the work done here in this research. Renewal means reestablishing the church to the purposes and provisions of God who created it. Jesus founded the Church according to the plan of God. Restoring the body of Christ is not something that people do on their own, but what God does through those who allow God to do so. The power of the Holy Spirit is the central element in the renewal of the church. When people of God surrender

and are willing and ready to be used by God, then the church is pleasing God and living out the mission of the faith.

Chapter one describes the church and the city of Holly Springs. The author attempted to give a clear image of the church and its relationship with the city. Asbury's rich past established it as an essential body of the community. Over the years, the church ministries in education contributed to the growth of the church and helped the congregation to endure through many years of social conflict and denominational changes.

Chapter two examines the biblical perspectives which relates to the project. Isaiah the fifty-eight chapter and Romans the twelfth chapter were the selected scriptures for this task. The two passages combine the theme of commitment while encouraging the congregation to renew their understanding of God's purpose for their lives. The perspectives ask the church to consider their call in their response to God.

Isaiah chapter fifty-eight focuses on a distinction between the individuals and their association with God. That relationship necessitates that love, when done in the correct setting, and as per what God anticipates, prompts a pledge to serve. In the proposed task, one finds that the congregation likewise has issues relating to God and necessities helping to remember their association with God. Isaiah was explicit in naming the issues which were of concern and urged the people to contemplate them.

In Romans the twelfth chapter, Paul invites the people to participate in that which is genuine giving of themselves as living sacrifices before God, giving themselves in body and mind to the work God will do in them, with them, and through them. The passage begins with Paul petitioning his listeners to action, using the words "I appeal to

you.” Paul is encouraging the readers, to respond to their faith by presenting themselves to be renewed by God and engaged in the work of God’s kingdom. The passage is an appeal to action on the part of the church and places the congregation in the position to renew their commitments as followers of Jesus Christ. Asbury and churches like it should consider their condition before God and offer God their complete focus and commitment.

Chapter three connects Asbury’s history back to the class movements of the Methodist formed in England by John and Charles Wesley. Asbury remained in the Methodist church despite the numerous changes throughout its history. The congregation continues today as a strong traditional United Methodist congregation. The classes of the early Methodist will show how the organization of the church functioned in the past and how considering those past methods might help to renew the congregation's call to ministry. The classes were bound together by a network of those who committed themselves to help others and made covenants that held them accountable to their commitments. Asbury formed the need for a place of worship that was necessary, but they also needed to provide for those in need, which became a primary concern.

Chapter four seeks to connect the theology of the church with the context by examining the theology of John Wesley and his call to faith, and love. The church is to connect with the call of Christ. Christ calls the church to be in ministry to all the world and to make disciples of all persons. Adhering to this call requires faith that relies on God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The example of love is to love God first and second, our neighbors. The primary point is to bring the church into an understanding of the grace

of God and how as God's people do the will of God throughout the world. To be renewed in Christ is to be accountable for the work of Christ.

Chapter five examines the value of observing organizations outside of religious bodies to learn ways in which those institutions approach the subject of renewal.

Theoretically, all institutions endure a period of restoration. By studying those companies we have sought to gather data that will be helpful the project. One such organization was IBM, and they use the Strategic Renewal process which proved to be useful in directing the church to a model of renewal.

In chapter six, the author developed and deployed several methods in gathering information to support the thesis. Three surveys, three study sessions, personal interviews, and collaboration from Asbury church groups provided the research and data needed to complete the project. The critical point of the thesis indicates that if Asbury returns to its original call of educational enrichment, then the church will return to a renewed growth and re-connection with its community.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### *Introduction*

It is no longer common knowledge that many of the colleges and universities, of America, were birth and founded by religious groups or churches. These groups helped to shape the very nature of our society. These institutions also contributed to direct the spiritual state of our culture.

Schools and colleges developed their missions differently in the early colonies and throughout the New World. All pursued their purpose with energetic urgency. The educational goal was to aid children in having the opportunity to grow spiritually and intellectually in all parts of the thirteen colonies. There was a strong connection between the God-given intellect of a person and spirituality.

Asbury United Methodist Church and Rust College share a connection to the public education system of Holly Springs. The school system could use help in increasing the number of persons who finish high school, attend college and finish college. Asbury still processes the potential and resources to create ministries that will assist the school district to attain its goals. By revisiting its original mission of educating those in need, the church will regain its connection with the citizens of Holly Springs and began a move toward active growth and ministry.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement, once said of the Methodist, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. However, I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."<sup>1</sup> This bold statement, from the founder of the Methodist Movement, sets the foundation for the project I seek to embark. The quote, "unless they hold fast the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out" speaks very clearly to the present condition of the United Methodist Church today. John Wesley's statement also speaks to the nature of the Asbury United Methodist Church in Holly Springs, Mississippi.

Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis Asbury presented to every Methodist congregation in America in 1791 this challenge: "give the core of knowledge in a general way to your children, and those of the poor in the vicinity of your small towns and villages."<sup>2</sup>

### **Context**

Asbury was born as an institution with a twofold purpose. First, to provide a place of worship for those set free from slavery after the Civil War. Second, to help educate ex-slaves of whom many could not read or write. These ex-slaves, who had no home to

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism," IMARC, accessed March 17, 2019, [http://imarc.cc/one\\_meth/vol-02-no-02.html](http://imarc.cc/one_meth/vol-02-no-02.html).

<sup>2</sup> Alabama – West Florida Conference, "Alabama-West Florida Conference June 3 – 6, 2018 ...," accessed March 17, 2019, [https://www.awfumc.org/files/mcp\\_files/2018 ac working agenda.pdf](https://www.awfumc.org/files/mcp_files/2018%20ac%20working%20agenda.pdf).

return to, remained in the areas known as contraband camps. They became labors and set up residence. The majorities of the ex-slaves were not educated and had no understanding of how society functioned. They were always taken care of by their owners and were ignorant of how to take care of themselves in these now hostile environments. Therefore, the need to open places of worship and schools became a necessity.

In 1866, the African American community needed the gospel, and they also required education. Therefore, Asbury's mission became the catalyst for the interest in the church. The mission requires work that is developed by faith in God and testifies to the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. According to the letter of James, "Faith without Works is Dead."<sup>3</sup> James asserts that the believers' faith is directly connected to the work of the church. The act of providing for those who are in need provides a means to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Asbury's members by faith responded to the specific needs of the community. People came to that answer, and the church grew as a result. The creation of Rust College is also a result of the church's efforts to meet the needs of God's people. For 150 years the church along with the college has worked together to serve and meet the spiritual and educational needs of God's people not just in Holly Springs but throughout the world. Asbury is in a place in time where they should consider addressing the education needs by enhancing their ministry within the Holly Springs community.

Holly Springs is a small city with very few people. The quality of life is very minimal and will require much thought and further research to determine its actual needs. It is also evident that Asbury sits in a community that has not changed a lot in more 150 years. This statement does not mean that the church cannot continue to grow or expect

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<sup>3</sup> Biblical citations throughout this document are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted, James 12:26.



future growth. However, it does indicate that a different way of thinking and a new approach to ministry will be needed to move the church in a new direction.

A close look at demographic data reveals three significant factors for the church to consider in future growth. First, the population is growing at a slow pace. In 2010, the population of Holly Springs was 3,961. In the year 2016, the community dropped to 3,893. This decrease constitutes a 1.7% fall and is expected to rise to 3,997 by the year 2021. The 2021 increase is only 2.7% within eleven years.<sup>4</sup> This fact indicates that the church will not experience large congregational growth unless the church expands its target area. The present target is a one to three-mile radius but will need to extend to five miles. Secondly, the number of persons educated can pose an opportunity for Asbury. The figures show us that there are 1,302 persons without college degrees. One Thousand Sixty persons did not graduate from High School. There are 796 individuals combined who graduated from high school and college.<sup>5</sup> There is an opportunity for Asbury to renew its original mission of assisting in the education of the population of Holly Springs. The congregation has the leadership and resources to embark upon this most important task.

Lastly, the number of married couples compared to the number of singles persons with children offers the congregation an additional challenge. With a median age at thirty-six, there is an opportunity to create ministries to meet the needs of these young people. Many churches are having difficulty reaching young people of this age group. Asbury is in an excellent position to appeal to these young people because of its ties with

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<sup>4</sup> "Missioninsite Report," Mission Insite: Community Engagement Specialists for Faith and Nonprofit Groups, accessed March 17, 2019, <https://missioninsite.com>.

<sup>5</sup> "Missioninsite Report," Mission Insite, accessed March 17, 2019, <https://missioninsite.com>.

Rust College. Students from the college are already involved in the activities of the church. The church can develop partnerships with the college where the students and membership work together to encourage and draw young persons from the community.

It is evident that Asbury was born as an institution with a twofold purpose. First, was to provide a place of worship for a group of people hurting and in need. Second, was to help educate those persons for survival. They needed the gospel, but they also required education.

Asbury United Methodist stands at a threshold. The church is in a very stable condition and has not yet realized the dangers of decline. The future work and project I will propose will help the congregation achieve its full potential. The project will assist the church in reconnecting with its present community and creating ministries to address two primary needs of that community. The first is to identify ways in which the congregation can again be involved in helping the school district with specific issues causing shortfalls in graduation rates. Secondly, to create ministries that reconnects with the young adult population of Holly Springs. It is an assertion that if the church can find ways to return to its original organizing focus, then the church will realize growth in numbers and spiritual fortitude.

Asbury also should work to redirect the community perception of the congregation. The task to re-establish mission and to refocus its image will require a bit of transformative thinking on the part of leadership and membership. Understanding the statistical data mentioned above will help to develop the goals to accomplish this.

### **Ministry Journey**

From the time of being called into ministry, God has placed urgency within me to lead the church in a renewed understanding of its relationship with God. I have always felt compelled to remind the church of its responsibility to serve God by serving God's people. Therefore, a significant portion of my ministry has been geared toward outreach and administration.

As I began doing ministry, I was surprised to discover that the persons in the church were not as interested in moving in ministry but was more concern with maintaining the congregation in the state it had come to be. It was at this time that I also realized that the church was in decline. What was more mind opening was that many of the parishioners did not want to discuss the condition of the church and somehow overlooked the overarching realities right before their eyes. The church, in my opinion, lacked faith, hope, and spiritual direction. These missing attributes lead to a lack of spiritual power and testimony. At some of the churches, I was warned not to push too hard or fast to bring about changes that would enhance the future of the church. In many cases, I would make suggestions as to the possibility of mission and ministry, and a disagreement took place.

The problems within the congregations were so prevalent that the blame was on me, the pastor, for not being effective. However, we know that these situations existed long before I ever became the pastoral leader. So, I developed a philosophy that would drive my efforts and concerns for the church. That philosophy is that the church's inability to embrace ministry do not deter my responsibility as the spiritual leader to implement ministry. Regardless of how the congregation functioned, it would not

interfere with my role as pastor and leader of the church. I am not saying that I would go off on my own to divide and conquer but to use the opportunity to be enervative and creative in alternative ways of doing ministry.

As a United Methodist Pastor, I was deployed to provide leadership in several ways. We are to ensure the faithful transmission of the Christian Faith.<sup>6</sup> As pastors, we are to give pastoral support, guidance, and training to the lay leadership, equipping them to fulfill the ministry which they are called.<sup>7</sup> Ordain Clergy are to embody the teachings of Jesus in servant ministries and servant leadership.<sup>8</sup> Pastors are invited to participate in the community's ecumenical and inter-religious concerns and to encourage persons to become involved and to pray and labor for the unity of the Christian community.<sup>9</sup> These statements indicate that pastors possess different responsibilities which allow for leadership to excel. Supported by the Book of Discipline pastors are not to be hindered by stagnation and complacency within the local congregation. Our role is to guide those of the faith forward into the general commission of the Church, and that is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Mission and ministry attest to the power and testimony of the local church in its community. The church can return to success in ministry by refocusing on the original

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<sup>6</sup> Secretary of the General Conference, *United Methodist Discipline* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2017), paragraph 340.1a.

<sup>7</sup> Secretary of the General Conference, *United Methodist Discipline*, paragraph 340.2c (1).

<sup>8</sup> Secretary of the General Conference, *United Methodist Discipline*, paragraph 340.4d (1).

<sup>9</sup> California-Nevada Annual Conference, “Duties of Pastor,” accessed January 10, 2017, [http://www.cnumc.org/files/pdf\\_documents/appointment/dutiesofpastor.pdf](http://www.cnumc.org/files/pdf_documents/appointment/dutiesofpastor.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> California-Nevada Annual Conference, “Duties of Pastor,” accessed January 10, 2017, [http://www.cnumc.org/files/pdf\\_documents/appointment/dutiesofpastor.pdf](http://www.cnumc.org/files/pdf_documents/appointment/dutiesofpastor.pdf).

call of the church. Asbury history teaches us that education and a strong call to provide needs beyond the church was crucial in the development of the church. I believe that the present status of the church is a call for renewal. Renewal is crucial to helping the body understand the reason it was called into existence. Asbury has left behind some important attributes that could serve the church in future growth.

In 1990, while serving St. Mark UMC in Gulfport, Mississippi, we developed a summer ministry called “Camp I Can Do.” In Gulfport, there were very few activities for youth age children during the summer months when students were out on vacation. Law enforcement brought to the faith community’s attention that problems with young people getting in trouble and hurting themselves were due to a lack of constructive activities to keep them safe while parents worked during the day. Many parents could not afford to place their children in expensive summer programs and left them at home with older siblings. The camp programs lead to underage children finding ways to entertain themselves.

“Camp I Can Do,” was implemented to provide a place where parents could put their kids during the day while they worked. This haven was open to the entire public at an affordable cost, (\$10.00 per child). The camp provided breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack. The kids enjoyed supervised activities such as swimming, martial arts, reading, creative dance classes, and music training. There were mentors assigned to children whose parents requested it. The mentors were able to establish relationships with several of the students. The camp also provided field trips, education enrichment, and conversation with community professionals and politicians.

Providing the camp ministry taught valuable lessons about our church and community. First, when the church is involved with the community offering a unique need, the city in turns responds to the church as a place of the resource. Parents who brought their kids to the camp began to feel that the congregation cared and as a result, several started attending church. Secondly, the children in the camp began to associate the camp as their church. When asking where you attend church, they responded St. Mark. This response came, as a result, the young people witnessing the church being the church. Camp I Can Do lasted for sixteen of the nineteen years of my service on the Gulf Coast. I often encounter people who remind me that they attended the camp who are now members of St. Mark serving as leaders and advocates of the church. When the church seeks to meet the needs of its community, the community will respond to the church.

Another relevant ministry developed was the St. Mark United Methodist Fellowship House. The ministry got its name from a house used as a parsonage. A group of women from the church converted and began using the house as a place for meetings and cooking fellowship meals for Wednesday night gatherings. While meeting with the ladies, they expressed to me that we should be doing more with space and ask me to think of some ideas for the ministry they could consider. After a brain a storming session the Outreach Committee it was decided that we use the house as a community center for social needs.

We converted the house with a little renovation and opened in 1993. The ministry consisted of a food pantry, clothes closet, a Wednesday meal center, job referral service, and a grief recovery center. At first, the community was hesitant to come into the center but once the word got out that people were genuinely helping others began to attend. All

of the ministries of the house were open to anyone who felt the need to come. All are welcome, and in about three months we were serving a total of 400 persons in all of its ministries. The uniqueness of the Fellow House gave us the opportunity in many cases to get very acquainted with many of the patrons who came to the house for help. That is where the church benefited from these efforts and grew as a result. Reminded of the scripture used as the foundation our work together in the Fellowship House which was Romans 12: 11 which states “Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.” The work of the Fellowship House helped us see that the work of the Lord was needed in the Gulfport community and several persons came to Christ. Needs were met, and a positive image of the Church revealed.

A third ministry that will help me in the development of my project is a ministry created in 1998 called “Future Lead.” This ministry designed for high school students had a tremendous impact on the community of Gulfport and St. Mark. Youth from the three high schools of Gulfport were chosen through a selection process, administered by a panel of high school teachers and educators. The program admitted fifty students. The program was made possible by a grant from the State of Mississippi Children and Youth Department.

Future Leads goal was to enhance, encourage, and employ High School Students as they considered their future vocations and careers. Students were assigned to placement based on their interest and given the opportunity to observe several occupations. The arrangements included medical doctors, attorneys, judges, bankers and community social agencies. They were also required to attend mentoring groups and

tutoring. Classes were taught in science, math, and reading. The classes were designed to enrich the student's education and social life.

The success of the Future Lead indicated that the students in the program achieved high grades in their schoolwork and thirty percent of them did enter the field of work of their choice. Graduates tell us that the program was the sole reason they were able to accomplish their dreams and aspirations. Here again, the church was able to observe a need in the community and responded in ministry. The church is still necessary today to strengthen and guide the Kingdom of God.

In my ministry journey, the projects mentioned above among others, such as Community Vacation Bible School, Affordable Child Care, and Habitat for Humanity all have given me a wealth of experience to move forward. As I stated before most of the work I have done is in outreach. However, I also have an abundance of expertise in the administrative area of the church. I have served several positions in the church and community which have afforded me the opportunity to help in leadership.

Twelve years I acted as a member of the Board of Ordain Ministry. First, I served as a member of an ad hoc committee then moved to the full board in 1996. In the year 2000, I became chair of the Board of Ordain Ministry. The work of this committee was a tremendous challenge to me because it requires time that took me away from my job as a pastor. It also taught me the critical responsibility of the board to identify persons qualified to serve as pastors in the conference. The board ensures that competent persons are received and affirmed as servant leaders. The work of the Board of Ministry is helpful to the Cabinet in the deployment of pastors. Qualified and competent ministers are needed in the churches which can impact the work of the congregation. I believe the



process of discerning the direction of the church begins with the pastor. Without spiritual and energetic ministers, the church may struggle to do ministry.

I believe that if the church is to reconnect with the community and identify ministries that will meet the needs of the community, then the pastor must take the lead. The pastoral leader is the primary spiritual leader of the congregation. The pastor carries responsibility for some different ministry tasks.<sup>11</sup> Effective pastors will also take time for their spiritual growth and restoration to maintain a vital ministry. Serving as spiritual leader and pastor must make a significant role in the process.

Another significant help for me as I seek to develop a project, comes from the time I spent serving a small congregation called Riley Chapel United Methodist Church. The Riley church was finding ways to be more engaged in their community but did not know what the community needed. Those things thought needed the only speculation such as drugs, teenage pregnancy, poverty, and crime. Those issues are important and deserve attention, but none of them were leading problems according to the community. After a period of having workshops and programs that very few responded to, we decided to change our approach. We found that we only needed to ask the community what its needs were. We then hosted some town meetings to question the people of their opinions and concluded that the primary concern was affordable childcare.

The problem that existed was that several parents in the community found it difficult to work and afford decent childcare. The result of this leads to parents not working and drawing subsidy to try and make ends meet for their family. Parents were not just hoping for any daycare but the quality and affordable childcare. The church then

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<sup>11</sup> Cokesbury General Board of Discipleship, "Guidelines Pastor," accessed January 10, 2017, <https://www.cokesbury.com/product/9781501829833/guidelines-pastor-download/>.

began to seek ways to make this happen. After several months of work, the congregation in conjunction with another church opened and operated a childcare center that focused mainly on underserved families. The implementation of the ministry would not have been if it were not for the questions presented to the community. We cannot always assume that the church is aware of what the community needs, but the church can best serve the community when it is in conversation with the community. This fact will be critical to me as I seek to develop the proposed project.

My experience in the church, as well as the community, attests to my willingness to lead the members of the congregation into a ministry that reaffirms the church's mission and its commitment to God's purpose in the world. I have had the opportunity to experience churches that have changed the direction of their futures. I have worked with congregations that were willing to make changes to enhance the growth of the church. I have collaborated with community agencies that have helped me to understand the role of leadership in enabling people to work together in finding solutions to the problems facing our organizations.

### **Synergy**

As I begin this section, I would again like to point out that Asbury United Methodist Church is just one congregation among several facing the same issues of decline. My question is, why is a group with such a rich and long history, ample resources, and continuous ministry at a point of decline? The following is a list of those congregations that are similar to the conditions of Asbury's. The congregations are located within the state of Mississippi and are all of the Mississippi Annual Conference.

Table 1. Churches in Mississippi with declining conditions<sup>12</sup>

<b>Church</b>	<b>Year Organized</b>	<b>Size of Membership</b>	<b>Average Attendance</b>
Pratt UMC- Jackson, MS	1897	150	65
Central UMC- Jackson, MS	1876	300	85
St. Paul UMC- Meridian, MS	1868	275	52
St. Paul UMC- Hattiesburg, MS	1872	200	40
St. Paul UMC- Biloxi, MS	1870	210	50
<i>Improved churches</i>			
Asbury UMC- Holly Springs, MS	1866	320	140
Griffin Chapel UMC- Starkville, MS	1869	400	100
<b>St. Mark UMC- Gulfport, MS</b>	<b>1897</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>80</b>

As we can see from the information above, there is not much difference in the years of the organization, membership size and an average attendance of these congregations. I believe that this shows us that the organizational structures developed by these churches are not only similar but very useful. To be able to exist for such a long time and to continue, to this day, and show some vitality is astounding. All of these are African American churches that came into existence as a result, of the emancipation of slaves in the South. Today they are in the same condition needing to grow and to reconnect with the communities in which they exist. I contend that there are churches all over the United Methodist connection that are just like these congregations in Mississippi.

Asbury United Methodist Church stands at a crossroads in determining the direction of its future. With a long history of supporting education and longevity within

<sup>12</sup> Mississippi Annual Conference, "2014 Journal," vol. 2, 2014, 113.

the City of Holly Springs Mississippi, the congregation is capable of growth. The church is at a standstill in relating to the community and needs to reconnect. I contend that Asbury should seek to develop ministries that will lead to a renewed relationship with its community.

The problem that exists is that the present congregation does not see itself needing to make the kind of changes or moves to enhance its future. I propose to create modules that will help to transform the thinking of those parishioners and assist them to come together to take the church forward. These modules will lead to a plan to aid the Holly Springs School District to increase high school graduation ratios and to raise the number of persons who attend and graduate from college.

Module one will be a series of conversations between the congregation and the community. These conversations will work to acquaint the church with the immediate neighborhood and encourage dialogue that informs both parties of their needs and intentions. Meetings will be held in small groups such as civic clubs, sororities, fraternities, chamber of commerce, Rotary, school officials, parents, and others. Information from these meetings will be collected and separated by topic and category.

Module two will be a time of reading and listening to the information gathered from the meetings. A task group will be assigned to the evaluation process. Needs will be ranked, and resources collected to support the committee's findings. We then will return to the community in town hall type meetings to discuss and plan a course of action. In this process, we will also solicit persons to help in the development and implementation of the project. Needs for the project should be considered at this time, and the congregation will be asked to assume the responsibility of any financial obligation. There

are many ways money can be raised to support the ministry, and a group will also be asked to work through a plan of action to raise funds. An instrument of evaluation will be created. The assessment tool will help me to track any success of the project.

Module three will be to create a plan and prepare for implementation. The project will identify the needs of the community, re-establish conversation with the community and allow Asbury to serve the city again in hopes of growing the congregation. At this point, the entire group should be fully vested.

Implementation is the last phase of the project. The implementing of this program will take lots of time and patience for it to accomplish its goals. Implementation will require some interested leaders who are committed to helping the church and are rooted in the ministry of Jesus Christ. When this plan is in force, the community will witness the church acting out the mission of the church. The church will again care for the immediate needs of the people, and the people will respond. Discovering the need in Holly Springs for revised education efforts the church could return to its days of aiding in the education school children and adults.

### **Conclusion**

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, said that people called Methodist should “by doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have the opportunity, doing good of every possible sort and giveth, by giving food to the hungry...,” submitting to Christ.<sup>13</sup> These words remind us as believers in Christ we are to work for the kingdom. Being a member of the church only does not of itself carry

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<sup>13</sup> “Is by Grace Through Faith a Good Work?” Christian Forums, accessed December 29, 2018, <https://www.christianforums.com/threads/is-by-grace-through-faith-a-good-work>.

the word of God to the people. We as Christians must submit to our calling to the mission of Christ.

Asbury United Methodist Church is at a major crossroads in its life. Perhaps, as at no other time, this congregation appears to be ready to discern and adopt for itself God's vision for its future. However, the church appears to be floundering for lack of vision and focus: within its ministries. Using the leadership that already exists and refocusing that energy in ways that the Holy Spirit will lead us will awaken within this congregation new energy and vitality. A discerned Mission Statement describing the vision for the congregation and giving direction for this body of Christ will allow the entire congregation to move in-step together as one body rather than as two hundred twenty-five individuals. Perhaps it may also redefine the understanding of community and context for ministry.

The church must be intentional in its efforts to reach the masses of people. The church must make itself relevant again to the community and open itself to receive those who seek Christ. The church must grow to survive. I believe that God has already given the tools to make all of this happen. Renewal and restoration concepts will help to address the process of ministry and give fresh meaning to the role of Asbury as a beacon within the city of Holly Springs.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

This chapter will clarify the thesis, from a biblical perspective, that Asbury United Methodist Church should return to its original mission of education in the community of Holly Springs Mississippi. This congregation is and has been vital to the city and conference of the United Methodist Church for more than 150 years. With its vast resources, the church is capable of returning to a time when this work helped to propel the congregation to a place that reached so many people and led many to Christ.

The biblical concept of restoration implies that the church will find themselves accomplishing more than they have ever achieved. Not only will they return to their original mission but will progress into greater works. The church is at a juncture that is very crucial to its future. Asbury possesses a potential of vitality and strength that is so greatly needed by the community.

The time of restoration is necessary to return to the mindset needed. Once the congregation reaches a level of spiritual transformation, recovery is possible. It has been a long and slow process of moving away from the work of the church that has caused a significant decline in church growth. The running away from the work, to a content satisfaction of worship gives the congregation a false sense of spirituality.

The author contends that the church today is at a standstill. Though the congregation is vital and functioning, growth is not taking place. The community does

not consider Asbury to be a place of spiritual refuge or a fellowship of love and compassion. The forementioned attributes must be earned by participating in the community and living out the call of Jesus Christ through the high commission of the Church (Mk. 16:15). Worship is taking place. Prayers are asked of God. Hope and expectation are prevalent in the life of believers. The church is not growing.

The church needs to enter into a time of restoration. Asbury is vital but not growing. Recovery is necessary to return to a time of prosperity and growth. Understanding this concept, the membership will need to involve themselves in serious conversations about the mission of the church. Restoration will return the congregation to a time when the church understood the nature of the call of God and a place where the community was evident. Worship at that point was a celebration of the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God blessed their efforts and added to their number.<sup>1</sup>

The biblical perspectives chosen to help explain these concepts are from Isaiah the fifty-eight chapter and Romans the twelfth chapter. Both passages will identify in some way the critical need of God's people to respond to the justice expectations of His word. Worship and fellowship are not enough to receive the full benefit of God's blessings. Work is required; therefore, worship and praise should lead to outward and visible signs of God's presence. Restoration takes place when congregations re-think their understanding of their true covenant with God. When this conviction takes place the church will begin to experience growth again. The concepts being proposed present a tremendous challenge to churches that are stagnated and not growing because these groups tend to assign growth problems to social and economic issues. Pointing fingers

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:47; Praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.



outside of the congregation allow too many churches to become complacent and unfruitful in mission and ministry.

### **Old Testament**

Isaiah 58:6-14 states:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

The book of Isaiah contains some of the most memorable passages in the Hebrew Bible, including visions of a future world peace in which all of the creation, both human and animal is subject to Yahweh's rule. Although traditionally regarded as the work of a single prophet, scholars believe that the Book of Isaiah is an anthology of prophetic literature that spans almost the entire era of Israelite prophecy, from the mid-eighth to the fifth century BCE. Most scholars divide the book into three different parts, each representing a different historical period and a different author.

### *Context*

Section one of this book, chapters one through thirty-nine, contains oracles by Isaiah the prophet, the one for whom the book is named. Isaiah was active between 742 and 701 BCE. Chapters forty through fifty-five, the time of judgment passed, and the prophet speaks words of security and inspiration to people exiled in Babylon and ready to be released by Cyrus of Persia. The final ten chapters, incorporating a collection of oracles from almost the whole range of biblical prophecy, are thought to be passages from another unknown prophet, Third Isaiah, who lived in Judah after the exiles' return from Babylon. The Book of Isaiah represents and incorporates the three principal themes or concerns of Israel's prophets: warnings of divine judgment, promises of forgiveness and reconciliation, and responsibilities of restoration.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the true prophet, Isaiah of Jerusalem, warned the people of impending punishment for their social injustice and disloyalty to God. Secondly, Isaiah proclaimed that the people's suffering was complete and their release from Babylon imminent. The book as a whole thus served as a pattern or model for future generations, illustrating the nature and consequences of covenant-breaking, as well as the willingness of Israel's God to save and redeem a repentant people.

Isaiah 58:6-14 falls in the section of the book referred to as Third Isaiah. The setting for this Oracle is post-exilic and is written to the Israelites who have returned from captivity. The authors are unknown. However, these works have also been

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<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Clifford, "Isaiah, Book of," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, ed. K. D. Sakenfeld, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 75-91. Emphasizes the thematic unity of the three different prophets whose oracles contributed to the book between c. 750 –500 b.e.

considered as part of Second Isaiah and differ only in the period for which they are written. Third Isaiah is a reminder to the returned exiles, of the ethical and religious obligations inherent in their restoration and reconciliation with Yahweh.

The subject of this section is “True Fasting.” From early times fasting was associated with bereavement, (1 Sam. 31:13; and 2 Sam 1:12), repentance, (1 Sam. 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27), and prayer (2 Sam. 12:16-17, and Ps. 35:13). The Law of Moses prescribed fasting only in connection with the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31, 23:27-32, and Num. 29:7), but fast was also proclaimed in times of national emergency (Jdg. 20:26, and 2 Ch. 20:3). In later time the trauma which resulted from the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587 BC gave rise to regular fast days to mark these terrible events (Zach. 7:1-7). The fast days were impressive, solemn occasions when the whole community gathered. The fast was good in itself, but it was also destructive, for it created an impression of religiousness which was often far removed from the real state of affairs. It imposed a uniformity of observance which disguised the difference between those who were genuine mourners and those who were not (58: 1-2). This type of fasting could develop into self-righteousness, as though fasting of itself was the only way to respond to God’s will. A religion that grows into self-righteousness becomes empty worship, lacking integrity and power. When religion is the outcome, though; when the church fails to worship God without the need for repentance, the church fails to represent the true call of God’s will.

### *Detailed Analysis*

After the exposure of wrong fasting (v. 1-5) comes to the description of the kind of fasting that pleases God (v. 6-12). Fasting along with honest repentance, especially turning away from exploitation and quarreling (vs. 3b, 4a, 6). It is not merely to go without food on the set fast days but to adopt a way of life in which intemperance and greed are given up and replaced by generosity towards the poor (v. 7). Fasting that pleases God and leads to God's blessing (v. 9). Today, many churches have fallen in conflicted worship simpler to the Israelites at the time of this writing of Isaiah. Worship that does not lead to service does not please God.

Detailed analysis of verse six, which states, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" Fasting, as the people understood it, was always directed to God, but the fasting recommended by the prophet is directed towards humans. There is a distinction drawn between a God-centered and a person-centered fast. The prophet's focus is on God; however, when the two are kept apart both lose their significance. The fast, which God directs toward humans will "loose the bonds of injustice," that is to dissolve every tie wherewith one has unjustly bound his fellow men (Lev. 25:49, Jer. 22:3-5, Mic. 6:8 and Ecc. 5:8). God's preferred fast will "to undo the thongs of the yoke which is to release the burdens (Lev. 26:13, 1 Ki. 12:4 and Gal. 5:1). Similarly, losing the bonds of wickedness and letting the oppressed go free are actions that can be varied limiting for the participant for there is risk involved: the participant might be going

against the desires of those who have a vested interest in maintaining the unjust situations.<sup>3</sup>

Verse seven states, “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” In verse seven God continues to share God’s vision. Rather than accentuating fasting as an act of disciplined worship, God encourages the sharing of the bread with those who are hungry. The people are requested to provide for the homeless and to give clothing to the ones that are naked. Brueggemann implies, “notice how material the new spirituality is; it concerns bread, home, body, flesh, engagement with the painful deadliness of human wretchedness and needs.”<sup>4</sup>

This verse lists the traditional acts of help to those in trouble. Numbers of persons whose social standings are poor passes before us, such as disfranchised, down and outs, slaves, prisoners, the hungry, the homeless, the cold. It is a similar picture to the one in Matthew 25:35ff. The words at the end of verse seven, “you are not to hide from your own kin,” are found in identical terms in Deuteronomy 22:1. A transition has been made from prophetic utterance to speech of admonition, the style found in the preaching of the Levites in Deuteronomy. The words “who are your kin” are like those of Job 31:15, in a similar context: the passage in Job shows that the reference is to fellow-men and not to fellow countrymen. This passage has substantial implications for the church of today which in many cases hide from those who are in desperate need of their help. Although

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<sup>3</sup> K. A. Dickson, “He is God Because He Cares,” *International Review of Mission* 77 (1988): 229–237.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann et al., *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 129.

strong preaching and admonitions expressed each Sunday, the church still lacks the desire to move beyond itself into the community. What is being said in both Matthew and Isaiah is that there is no chronological distinction between worshipping God and serving one's fellow humans. Part of the definition of serving God is serving one's brothers and sisters. Worship and life are inseparable.

Verse eight states, "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard." The word light is an emblem of prosperity (Is. 58:10 and Job 11:17). Here in verse eight and in passages to come, Isaiah uses "light" as the symbol of final consummation, of the fulfillment of all God's promises for the Earth. This "light" will grow brighter, and this "light" will illumine the "gloom" in which people have been living, as they continue to perform these true acts of "worship" and praise.<sup>5</sup> The phrase "your vindicator shall go before you," indicates that conformity to God's word will bring forth vindication and salvation. Therefore, restoration will take place in the life of the believer.

Once the people are adhering to God's commands then "the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard." Compared with the pillar of cloud and fire in the Exodus story from Egypt, where the glory of God followed to the rear of Israel (Ex. 14:19-20 and Is. 52:12). God continues to support the one who believes and commit to the principles of the word of God. It is important for the church of today to be reminded of the responsibility to place faith into action.

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Sweet, "Exegesis of Isaiah 58:1-10: Twomey Center for Peace Through Justice," Loyola University New Orleans, October 1, 2008, accessed July 6, 2017, <http://www.loyno.edu/twomey/exegesis-isaiah-581-10>.

Verse nine states, “Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil.” We are now at the heart of what God expects of Israel. There was a misunderstanding as to the role of the people when fasting ritually. Many times they found themselves wondering if the act was necessary or if God heard their prayers. Here in verse nine, God assures them that “you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.” Throughout their history, God has reminded them of this very fact. When they call on God, He will hear their cries (Is. 65:24, Ps. 66:18, 15:29 and 28:29). The phrase, “the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,” refers to persons blaming the people they should be helping for the inconsistencies in faith and duty. Hosea also speaks to this and warns the people of this by encouraging them to change this practice (Hos. 4:4-19). Speaking evil of the people will not change their condition nor will it bring about justice.

From this verse onwards, the second point in the admonition connected with the promise of the blessing, any idea of Israel’s being addressed is completely abandoned. Only individuals are mentioned. Further, nothing more is said of the contrast between proper and improper fasting. One can compare the practice of fasting with modern day worship. The worship of the church today has become complacent and routine. Many are not convinced that the word of God is speaking directly to them. While many also see the work of the church as a collective effort on the part of the entire congregation, the Bible is clear that all members have a role to play in the work of God.

In verse ten, it states, “if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the

noonday.” Here the narrative begins to move to a renewal message, which speaks directly to each person. The allotment of food compared to the resources is an important aspect of concerned believers. To “offer your food to the hungry,” suggests a generous sharing of one’s resources with others.<sup>6</sup> *The New English Bible* states, “If you feed the hungry from your own plenty” and indicates that the translation could be “if you feed the hungry from what you want yourself.” What the prophet is referring to is the giving that hurts, suggested in verse seven.

In the “B” clause of verse ten, it states, “then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday,” which is similar to verse eight “A”, implying changed circumstances. One comes out of the night of unsatisfying religious content to the glory of being truly in the presence of God. The great paradox of the life of faith to which we receive through giving, and that we gain our lives by laying them down (Lk. 6:38, 9:24 and John 12:24-25. The only repentance that counts with God is the sort that can be seen in the way one lives, especially in how one treats other people Lk 3:7-14). The Christian Church is quite familiar with this concept of light. Jesus teaches that “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:22). The key here is to follow Christ. Not to follow means to remain in darkness.<sup>7</sup> Isaiah spoke this prosperity to Israel in a time when they were recovering from the exile into Babylon but made it clear that to recover fully; the will of God must be done.

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<sup>6</sup> “Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 58:1-14,” SermonWriter.com, accessed August 17, 2017, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/isaiah-581-14-commentary>.

<sup>7</sup> “Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 58:1-14,” SermonWriter.com, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/isaiah-581-14-commentary>.



Verse eleven states, “The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.” The prophet describes the believer's new life in a variety of images. It includes God’s leadership, and assurances that the upright will have their requests met even in dry places—a symbol for any difficult place in life. Healthy bone is an image of healthiness. Water represents prosperity. Prosperity, however, is not self-centered, selfish prosperity, but prosperity similar to a watered garden that provides food or water that serves several. Constant water is a comparison of eternal prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

In verse twelve, it states, “Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” The prophet now turns to the transformation of the nation as a whole. The worshippers, thus transformed, will be the means whereby the country as a whole will be transformed. The people will build on the physical foundation that had been neglected for so long since the devastation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. They will act with such purpose and commitment as will make them deserve to call the “repairer of the breach” and the “restorer of the streets.” The ruined conditions were to the prophets a symbol of the people’s hard-heartedness, the collapsed physical conditions where the outcome of the people’s spiritual wickedness; thus the physical blight must go as a mark of transformation.

These blessings are related to restoring the remnants and foundations and streets as well as restoring openings. Cyrus gave them their freedom so that they could return to

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<sup>8</sup> “Isaiah, 58:11,” Bible Hub, accessed December 10, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/isaiah/58-11.htm>.

Jerusalem. This set of promises is that they will equal to the task of rebuilding what God had given them before.<sup>9</sup>

Verse thirteen states, “If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs.” The religious observance here is Sabbath observance rather than fasting, but the same principle applies.<sup>10</sup> Just as people tried to place God under obligation by fasting, so also they have sought to put God under obligation by Sabbath observance.<sup>11</sup> Their observance has not grown out of genuine devotion to God but has instead been a calculated effort to obtain blessings from God.<sup>12</sup> This verse, then, has another “if” statement that lays out for them what God wants from them. God wants them to observe the Sabbath as a holy day and not as a selfish attempt to obtain something from God.<sup>13</sup> If they take delight in Sabbath observance as a sincere way of exalting the Lord’s character, his words, and his ways of religion will not be a burden, but a delight, and they will live in dignity with a sensitive appreciation of their heritage, which goes far back to Abraham (Gen. 28:12-14). The call for true Sabbath observance, like the call for true fasting, is a call to change the heart. There is no shortcut

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<sup>9</sup> Otto Kaiser, *The Old Testament Library: Isaiah* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> “Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 58:1-14,” SermonWriter.com, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/isaiah-581-14-commentary>.

<sup>11</sup> “Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 58:1-14,” SermonWriter.com, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/isaiah-581-14-commentary>.

<sup>12</sup> “Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 58:1-14,” SermonWriter.com, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/isaiah-581-14-commentary>.

<sup>13</sup> “Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 58:1-14,” SermonWriter.com, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/isaiah-581-14-commentary>.

to joy and victory (verse 14); they come through repentance, and a willingness to live God's way (Deut. 32:13).

Verse fourteen states, “then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” In this statement, the people hear of what to expect when they fulfill the “if” of verse thirteen. They will not fear the Lord and will be delighted to be in His presence. Their path through life will be pleasing, and the legacy of Jacob will be theirs (vs. 13).

A more fundamental meaning is that those who seek justice and righteousness thereby live in the presence of the just and righteous God; they are part of God's people.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, when the people attend to the needs of the hungry, the homeless, and the naked, they have their reward: the solidarity of the community is strengthened, their ‘light’ breaks forth, their ‘healing’ springs up, and their ‘vindication’... goes before them.”<sup>15</sup>

### Summary

A close look at this passage teaches that the righteous on many occasions has had difficulty maintaining an active worship life. During times of hardships and calamities, the church has struggled to be the place of refuge for the world. God's mercy has faithfully guided and nurtured the church to the place it exists today. The change in social

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<sup>14</sup> “Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 58:1-14,” SermonWriter.com, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/isaiah-581-14-commentary>.

<sup>15</sup> Fred B. Craddock et al., *Preaching Through the Christian Year: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Lectionary* (Norcross, GA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 103.

dimensions has affected the way in which the church receives and employs its mission and ministry.

Like those who fasted during the time of Isaiah, some churches only worship for their benefit and not encouraged to respond to the needs of others. The worship God seeks involves a life that exhibits justice and compassion (Verse 7). When God's people obey then and only then will God hear their concerns. E. Hamlin asserts that "Many Jews were faithfully carrying out their religious practices in the belief that following these rules would bring them close to God. They prayed daily and fasted regularly. Yet something was wrong. Their worship had no effect on the life of their community."<sup>16</sup> Asbury Church finds itself worshiping and doing ministry that is outwardly correct but does not reflect the true relationship with people outside of the congregation. Isaiah points out that worship must result in doing God's will.

Isaiah points to a disconnect between the people and their relationship with God. That relationship requires that worship, when done in the proper context and according to what God expects, leads to a commitment to serve. In the proposed project one finds that the church also has problems identifying with God and needs reminding of their relationship with God. Isaiah was specific in naming the issues which were of concern and encouraged the people to consider them.

Isaiah warns us that our seeking after God is inhibited by the economic injustices and violence in our midst. The presence of such oppression and violence indicates a deficiency in our spiritual practices. God calls us to redefine the very definition of the fast or practice of worship. It is not merely a period of humility marked by religious

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<sup>16</sup> E. John Hamlin, *Comfort My People: A Guide to Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1980), 181.

observances. A fast is not just the setting apart of times for prayer, nor is a fast the inward searching after the will of God. The purpose of the fast is not to compel the Lord that we are more serious than usual concerning a particular prayer request. Isaiah has no patience for such a fast! A popularly conceived fast such as this perceives of a personal faith far removed from the concerns of its neighbor that prays to a God far removed from the injustices of our world.

Humanity are invited to view the world with new eyes. Who are those that are hungry and afflicted? Who are the “poor wanderer” in our midst? The invitation is to see that God’s heart is for those such as these. His heart is not turned toward those who have perfected the practices of prayer and fasting. His heart yearns for those who have not yet been welcomed into the fold, those who have been left in the margins because they are the have-nots. They lack resources, food, and shelter. They have no power with which to assure their own justice. They have nothing to offer, yet it is to them our Lord extends grace. They are the ones to whom our faithful practices must be directed.

### **New Testament**

Romans: 12:1-8 states:

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in

ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

### *Context*

Paul, the author of the letter, in his previous religious relationship with God was very hostile toward the people call Christian. He found himself in a situation that compromised the very belief system of which he was born. The movement known as the “Way” presented a challenge to Paul and the Jews, whose traditional religion was hesitant to change. It would take an encounter on the road to Damascus to convince Paul, of the fact that he was persecuting the very God of whom he was so dearly committed. That event was a defining moment in Paul’s theology and acceptance of God’s people. After his eye-opening experience, Paul proceeded to encourage the world to submit and to renew their minds to please God. The renewing of the mind, according to Paul is the act of giving oneself over to God and allowing for the power of God to consume the soul. Once a person gives themselves over to the ways of God, then the plan of God is fulfilled in the world. Throughout the entire epistle, the theme of renewal and restoration resounds. The Jews who lived in Rome had made a transition to a new city but had not understood the concepts of being Christian in a place of such venue. When Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, he had not yet visited there. It is evident that he is aware of the church’s activities and makes it known to them that he strongly desired to meet them (Romans 1:10-12).

The letter is written before the great persecution of the Jewish Christians by Emperor Nero. Therefore, at the time of its writing, the church in Rome is at peace. The

main point of contention is that the church is surrounded by immorality and is constantly tempted to live in sin. Paul delivers this document which informs them of the reality of God's purpose and grace. Therefore, the purpose of Romans is to explain the systematic doctrine of God's grace. Paul begins with the sin of all humans. All are condemned because of our willingness to rebel against God. God through grace offers justification by faith in Jesus. Through justification, comes redemption by the blood of Christ which covers our sin. Those who pursue God do not finish with salvation; but by becoming sanctified, made holy, continuing to follow God.

In chapter twelve, Paul turns the reader's understanding of the practical truths of God. Paul calls the people to nonconformity of the things of the world and conformity to the things of God. Conformity comes from the transformation and renewal of the mind. The practical encouragement God calls his readers to are, to pray without ceasing and to show charity to one another as we are a redeemed community of forgiven sinners.

### *Detailed Analysis*

Verses one and two state, "I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect is." The theological grounding of Paul's ethics is very clear in verses one and two. The fundamental principle is a response to God, and this is expressed regarding worship. Paul's principle consisted mainly, according to the custom of the ancient world, both Jewish and pagan, of animal sacrifice; and Paul again makes

use of this analogy (cf, 3:25). His appeal is to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

The underlying meaning is that we are to make a total response to the grace of God, who has acted through Christ. The sacrificial metaphor made this very meaningful for the first readers of the letter. For these Jewish Christians would have been very familiar with the concept of making the sacrifice (Gen.4:3-5, 8:20-21, Lev. Chapters 1-7, and Deut. 12:23). However, most of them living in Rome would have been Gentiles, therefore not compelled or obligated to any form of self-sacrifice.

Significant differences from the usual practice of sacrifice are implied as follows,

1. Paul is talking to living persons, not dead animals, 2. The Christian offers himself to God; it is not a case of a priest performing ritual acts with the corpse of an animal.

Worship is still corporate, and there is still a place for the guidance of a priest or minister, but something is lacking without the personal participation of each. 3. Whatever ritual acts may be performed.<sup>17</sup> Christian worship is primarily spiritual. Worship in this sense is the whole of life. It is our adoring response to God of whose mercies we are aware of. We who would otherwise be unable to rise to our duty can do so because God has had compassion on us. New humanity has been inaugurated.

For those who are incorporated into Christ life has a new quality they have made the break from the secular ways and are no longer “conformed to this world.” The measure of this change is emphasized by the beautiful expression “renewal of your mind.”

Verse three states, “For by the grace is given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober

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<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Wall, N. T. Wright, and J. Paul Sampley. *The New Interpreter's Bible: Acts; Introduction to Epistolary Literature; Romans; 1 Corinthians:10* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 237.



judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” Paul begins to guild his readers with suggestions on how to live together. Paul has exhorted his audience to be transformed by the renewal of their mind; now they are to use that new mind to think rightly about themselves and each other, “I say to everyone among you not to *think* of yourself more highly than you ought to *think* but to *think* with sober judgment ... ”(verse 3). Paul calls for a new way of thinking that takes account of others. Also, Paul has exhorted his audience to present their bodies in 12:1; he now reminds them that they are one body in Christ with many members” (verse 4).<sup>18</sup> The call is to unity first by accepting the fact that none is more important than any other. This imperative is found in other epistles such as (Phil. 2:3, Gal. 6:3, 12-15) and expects the people of faith to realize the danger of taking undue credit for spiritual development. “For by the grace given to me,” Paul reminds us that everything we gain spiritually is only by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9, 2 Cor. 12:19 and 1 Cor 15:10).

What is impressive about the instructions to “think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned,” is the way they define individual Christian behavior in the light of corporate responsibility. Fundamentally, here is the recognition that whatever we have is a divinely apportioned gift. (Cf. 1Cor. 12:11, Matt. 25:15, Eph. 4:7, 2 Cor. 10:13). Sober judgment will also deter the tendency to take credit for what is God’s work or gift. A sober estimate of oneself, then, recognizes the amount of faith that God has given, and in consequence, does not yield to pride or (by implication) despair.

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Reasoner, “Commentary on Romans 12:1-8,” Working Preacher, accessed August 12, 2017, [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=127](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=127).

Verses four through five states, “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” To underscore the proper relationship between the one and the many, Paul introduces the metaphor of the body (1 Cor.12:12-13, 27, 1 Cor. 6:15,10:17). It is an analogy that reminds us of the plurality of the gifts and functions among us, and of the diversity as well. We may be many and uniform, or many and diverse. For Paul, the latter is the divine intention. For Paul, the church consists of many individuals processing many wonderful and divine gifts, and those gifts come together to form a body that presents itself as “a living sacrifice” for the purposes and will of God.

Especially strong here is the emphasis on being “members one of another.” It is the difference between being a group and being a community, between being related and being a family. What is called for is an active concern for, and involvement with, one another. This view leads to the conception of the church and each particular congregation as Christ’s body. The central idea was expressed in 6:3-11, but now the metaphor of the body is introduced into a living organism with many functions which, though different, work in unity for the health and growth of the whole.

Verses six through eight states, “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministries, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.” Paul finishes this section with a listing of gifts that make the church so unique. These gifts also referred to as spiritual gifts are not identical to such list mentioned in other writings of Paul such as (1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4:11), though

the list does overlap. It is not clear as to how much weight Paul places on the importance of these seven gifts because in other letters he mentions gifts such as interpretation, which is referred to as though it is part of the same list in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 30; there are five in Ephesians 4:11. Most commentators agree that the list here is incomplete. According to the *New Interpreter's Bible*, Paul does not know what unique gifts the Christians in Rome may possess, because he is unfamiliar with many of the persons of the church in Rome.<sup>19</sup>

The main point here is that Paul, by grace, has been given an individual task (vs. 3), so God also gives the congregation grace for multiple and joint tasks, and whatever they are they must be exercised to the full extent of the power given them. This main point explains Paul's statement "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ," therefore whoever understands their gift should not hesitate to use it. Many in the church do not exercise their gifts just because they lack understanding nor realize the importance of using them for the benefit of the entire body. In a word, the profile of behavior sketched here is a responsible sense of community, one that translates into a form of living together that embodies the "second great commandment."

Making contributions and doing acts of mercy also point away from the self, but the motive is crucial in each case, freely and cheerfully. Even being a leader, which calls for exerting oneself, should be an act done for the corporate good rather than for self-aggrandizement (Rom. 12:8, Thess. 5:12, 1Tim. 5:12, Heb. 14:17 and Mark 10:42-45).

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<sup>19</sup> Robert W. Wall, N.T. Wright, and J. Paul Sampley, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Acts; Introduction to Epistolary Literature; Romans; 1 Corinthians:10* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 2:890.

## Summary

In chapter twelve, according to Luther:

St. Paul teaches the true liturgy and makes all Christians priests, so that they may offer, not money or cattle, as priests do in the Law, but their bodies, by putting their desires to death. Next, he describes the outward conduct of Christians whose lives are governed by the Spirit; he tells how they teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live and act toward a friend, foe and everyone. These are the works that a Christian does, for, as I have said, faith is not idle.<sup>20</sup>

Luther is asserting that all persons are called to present their entire life and body to the work of the church by exercising faith that is directed by the Spirit. The work he speaks of is an external activity that serves to meet the needs of all God's people. The hope of the church is not to be dormant but rather active. Within the project, Asbury will be reminded of its responsibility to renew the work which exhibits their faith and commitment to be agents of God.

Paul according to Luke Johnson "calls for a transformation of mind that will enable one to test what is good. The gift of the Spirit empowers the capacity to measure reality differently than by the measure of the world and to discern in concrete circumstances the appropriate response by which God will be praised. At the end of this section, Paul also tells his readers to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh." They are to put on their identity symbolized by the new clothing of their initiation in such a manner that their behavior follows from it naturally. "They are to live by the pattern of the Messiah's life for others rather than by the pattern

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000).

of the flesh's self-seeking. And the pattern of the Messiah is found already in the Torah."<sup>21</sup>

Johnson identifies the nature of those called within the church to live and to give of their service to connect with God's people. Many churches today lack the zeal to give of themselves in such ways in which Paul speaks. To sacrifice one's life is not an option for many in the church. Sacrifice requires full dedication and compassion to the will of God within the context of the church. The renewal project will seek to ask the crucial questions that will bring attention to the need for sacrifice within the church. According to N.T. Wright, "Paul emphasizes that those who are justified in Christ and indwelt by the Spirit can, should, and regularly "pleases God," and that God is delighted with them not merely because they appear "in Christ" but because of what they are, and are becoming, and are beginning to do."<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion**

These two passages of scripture present many basic concepts which are related to the project. First, Isaiah helps us to understand that God is interested in the way we worship. There is a specific way we are to respond to the activity of worship. Worship is not just an act that brings us closer to God but helps us to move in a spiritual sense. This moving requires us to see others who need our help, both spiritually and physically. Isaiah the fifty-eight chapter calls us to remember those who are without the resources to survive in a world that in itself does not provide for them. We are the church and

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<sup>21</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 334.

<sup>22</sup> Wall, Wright, and Sampley, *New Interpreter's Bible*, 707.

representatives of God who calls us to a greater love beyond ourselves. Secondly, Isaiah causes us to see that tradition can block our access to God. Traditional concepts of worship such as Sunday worship being the place and only time to exhibit the light of God is a misconception of many believers today. Worship should lead us into the world with common goals to the light of God in the world. This light is not just for an individual to be seen but for the world to see the glory and power of God working in and through the church. When the church worships, it should display the compassion and hope of God. This hope and compassion should follow them into the community.

Another theme in which Isaiah suggests is the complaining of the people. Many churches today spend much time complaining about the lack of progress of the church and in many cases the decline of the church. The two are related to the congregation's lack of understanding of the relationship with God and their role in responding to that relationship. It is evident that most churches only care about God for their purposes. However, churches should return to the righteousness of God by serving God. The way one helps God is to serve others. The people of Isaiah's time are told that fast is not effective because the participants do not take them seriously, do not devote themselves reverently to fasting. I would insert the worship in place of the word fasting indicating that same concern that our religion is ineffective. The type of fast/worship that pleases God is what moves us to serve in the church. When the church responds to the needs of God's people such as those who are naked, homeless, and hungry they have their reward. The unity of the community is strengthened, their light shines forth, and their healing springs up, and their vindication goes before them (vs. 8).

Understanding how to relate to God in Worship is where the Romans passage helps in practical ways. Worship and obedience do please God. What are in question are genuine commitment and the willingness to share God-given gifts. To be obedient is to submit and work for God. Paul states that for this to take place congregants should surrender their bodies and use the gift that unites the full body of Christ. Members are not to hold claim to the gifts as their own but are reminded that by grace these gifts are given by God.

The life in Christ cannot remain as usual after receiving Christ; God through Christ opposes and tests us, to bring us into the acceptance of his kingdom, now and forever. Once the word of this good news infiltrates our hearts and minds, bringing new life in Jesus, faithfulness becomes the spiritual surrender of our bodies and our entire existences to God's service for the benefit of others. The gifts we received are to be used and not withheld. Our renewed mindset should propel us into a frenzy of service and commitment.

The church is in need of moving to a state of restoration. Paul speaks of transformation which is more of a changing from one mindset to another. Restoration of the believer takes place when transformative instruction affects one's way of thinking. One cannot change unless they are willing to allow their minds to be influenced by the grace of God's word. This transforming act requires the sacrifice of one's life over to God. Transformation begins with worship which Paul explains is our duty. Secular principles but those of God do not guide the worshiper. The result will be a life that shares its gifts and seeks unity with the whole body of Christ.

Churches are reminded of their responsibility to serve God first, in worship and second, by the sacrifice of themselves. Sacrifice is what pleases God and will help us to accomplish the purpose of God for the church.

Asbury and churches like it can first return to a state of proper worship which redirects true relationship with God. Second, Asbury and others like it can reinstate the mindset which guided the early members to a time of success within the congregation and community. Proper worship and renewed mindset could lead to ministries that set new courses for the future. In order for the church to prosper the body must be open to God's will. Then and only then the church will grow in the task of faithfulness.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The founding of a church in 1866 was not just a time to bring together a group of people to worship God on Sunday, but also an institution to “give learning to those who were set free.” Asbury United Methodist became aware of the dire need to educate freed slaves who could not read or write. This mandate automatically trussed the congregation into a mission which would lead to the development of Rust College. Though the mission to educate was necessary to the success of the church, it was a crucial need of the community as well. When the church was involved in the ministry of educating the community, the church flourished and became an intricate part of the Holly Springs Community. However, over the past years, the church has abandoned its efforts to aid in the education of the people of Holly Springs.

The people of the city needed help in the area of education, and today that same situation exists. Asbury could benefit from a restored understanding of their mission of aiding in the education of Holly Springs. The church no longer seeks to respond to the community from that perspective and has lost its connection. Asbury still has the potential and resources to return and reconnect with the people who continue to need their help. It was God’s calling upon the church to implement this ministry to His people.

*The Decline of the Black Church in America*

Many African American Churches across the United States were started similar to Asbury in Holly Springs. Many of those congregations have already dissolved while others are declining. Some have the resources to function while others are struggling to survive. The African American Church needs to take essential steps to realize its ability to serve the community adequately. The decline of the black church in America is fully documented and of grave concern of black leaders across the country.

Dr. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., William S. Todd, Professor of Religion, and chair of the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University, states that “the Black Church, as we have known it or imagined it, is dead. Eighty-seven percent of African Americans identify with a religious group, and seventy-nine percent say that religion is vital in their lives. However, the idea of this venerable institution as central to black life and as a repository for the social and moral conscience of the nation has all but disappeared.”<sup>1</sup> Dr. Glaude's view is that “the Black Church is dead” only expresses the severity of the church's condition. The author does not believe that the church is dead but instead is asleep and needs to be re-awakened to the true nature of its ministry.

Dr. Cornel West, Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University in referring to the state of the Church says, “So many black churches went to sleep, became addicted to the prosperity gospel, the market-driven conception of religion, of chamber-of-commerce religion, a market spirituality, a commodity-centered religion.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Glaude Jr., “The Black Church is Dead,” *HuffPost*, August 23, 2012, accessed January 10, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead\\_b\\_473815.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html).

<sup>2</sup> Cornel West, “So Many Black Churches Went to Sleep, Became Addicted to the Prosperity Gospel, the Market-Driven Conception of Religion, of Chamber-of-Commerce Religion, a Market Spirituality, a Commodity-Centered Religion,” Facebook, March 12, 2010.

Dr. West describes the actions of the church which are not intended. The Black Church has fallen away from its original ministry and call to make disciples and to meet the individual needs of its community.

The concept of renewal is imperative to the Asbury rediscovery of its mission. Renewal involves a return to the original idea or belief. Asbury initial view was that for the church to thrive the people had to learn to read and write. This concept was rooted in the understanding that the people needed not only the word of God but also a means of surviving in a world for which they knew very little. Many of the persons who joined Asbury and other churches alike were newly freed slaves. The lack of education would draw a large number of these now ex-slaves into newly formed religious bodies. The school was a significant impetus in the success of the African American Church in the early days of their existence. Therefore, the author contends that the black church should return to its mission to not only lead people to Christ but to aid in restoring the education system of its community. The history of the black church is a call to worship as well as a call to serve. The black community could not ignore the reality of the ex-slave condition, and with the help of some concern whites, those newly freed slaves are given an opportunity for success.

At the end of the American Civil War, Holly Springs Mississippi was one of five towns in the state of Mississippi. The city was incorporated in 1837. In 1860, the last Census Report indicated that the Negro population was 1075. This large numbers of African American persons encouraged the Methodist Episcopal Church to send the Holly Springs area a minister to organize a church. In January 1866, the Reverend Moses Adams arrived in Marshall County. News spread like wildfire by word of mouth as to the

arrival of Rev. Adams, a Methodist preacher. Freed slaves had already heard of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the stand to abolish slavery. Black people had already begun to revere Bishop Matthew Simpson, an advisor to President Abraham Lincoln. It had become known that it was Bishop Simpson who encouraged President Lincoln to write the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>3</sup> Rev. Adams was well received and Asbury United Methodist (then known as Asbury ME Church), was established. It would not be long before the church realized the critical need to organize a school for blacks in Holly Springs. This concept moved beyond the need for religious fulfillment but also an educational necessity.

To go further than worship on Sundays was a vital move to assure that the life of individuals was fully attained. People needed to learn how to read and write which was and is today a very important essential for survival in a world like ours. Therefore, the church took upon itself to educate persons. The concept of moving beyond the local church to serve the community was not new but was very common to the Methodist and the development of the denomination.

### *The Early Methodist Classes*

The early Class Movement of the Methodist sought to return and lead their follower to a life of service and mission. The Christian principles being referred to are those that inspire members of congregations to see their role in the church as more than a place of membership. The founder's reason for creating this movement was that they experienced Anglican churches that were not holding to the concepts of the first church

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<sup>3</sup> H. J. Graham, "Our Templed Hills" (Holly Springs, MI: unpublished, 1991).

and were becoming worldly and un-Christian. Congregations were no longer interested in the saving of souls for Christ, instead they sought to develop places of social gatherings. The Methodist Classes rediscovered the values and activities that lead to the creation of a Christian faith which exists to the present day.

Understanding the actions of the Methodist classes can help to revise the steps, structure, and lifestyles which lead others to Christ. Asbury can benefit from the insights of this movement of renewal. The congregation, as recently stated, is in decline but can recover. Close observation of the class movement will show that people were interested in moving toward a time when the church functioned according to the original principles of the faith. Many members recognize that the church today does not live according to common beliefs, but rather the body operates similarly to a social club. The church governs by statutes that are different from Christian teaching. A similar mindset exists today in the lives of many of the members of Asbury which has led to a lack of community connection and membership growth which is so critical to the future of the congregation.

### *A Movement of Renewal*

As previously stated, the black church is in a state of decline, therefore, needs renewal. The black church needs to be renewed to a time when the church prospered in its work to the community. Restored to a time when the heart of the people was set toward pleasing Christ. Renewed to a time when all members understood their role as workers in the church expressing their faith. Restored to a time when it was essential to lead others to Christ as examples of Him.

John Wesley, the most celebrated founder of the Methodist Movement, and after a short visit to the New World, returned to Oxford England. There he reunited with his brother Charles, who was then at Christ Church. Charles had organized a group of persons into a group who read the New Testament. John joined this circle and soon became their leader. These men showed great diligence about the Holy Communion than those of the church. They tended to guide their life by early church practice, a passion for prisoners and outcasts, and diligent and careful apportionment of time. As the members regularly went to take the sacrament, they received much criticism from other students who observed them. It was at this time that they were given the name Methodist because of the systematic way in which they practiced their missional work.<sup>4</sup> This Holy Club was not a replacement for church membership but rather a means of being accountable to God and each other in the faith these men professed.

While serving at Fetter Lane Religious Society, Wesley formed a society of a different type at the Foundry. It was started, probably, in the latter end of 1739, and looked upon as the Mother Society of Methodism. Thousands of men and women were converted to the Christian faith in these societies. The lack of mission and ministry available to members of the Anglican Church gave way to the success of the Methodist Societies.

In 1742 Wesley instituted the class meetings. It became evident that many adherents were not following the “General Rules,” which all Methodist vowed to keep. These General Rules were: do no harm, do good, and attend upon the ordinances of God. The first two are direct, “attend upon the ordinances of God” referred to basic Christian

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<sup>4</sup> Ross W. Genger, *The Holy Club: What Its Members Did While Waiting for God* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2011).

practices or disciplines. Wesley specially declares public worship, the ministry of the Word, the Lord's Supper, family, and private prayer, searching the scriptures, and fasting or abstinence. From the outset, Wesley realized that the class leaders were ideally suited to deal with the lack of discipline in practicing the rules among those called Methodists.

Initially, the class leader met each person at his or her own house. However, quickly decided was that it would be more practical for the entire class to meet together once a week. Wesley reported that at the class meeting, "advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed. Moreover, after an hour or two spent in this setting of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving." Wesley further reported on what he believed were the fruits of the class meeting: "It can be scarcely conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little practical regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another burdens,' and 'naturally' to 'care for each other.'" The more they met together daily, the more endeared affection they gained for each other. "And 'speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying itself in love.'"<sup>5</sup>

The class meeting became an essential time for empowering Methodists to watch more than each other in love, to help and energize each other in their lives with God. Wesley thought the oversight and support that the class meeting gave was essential to the

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<sup>5</sup> Genger, *The Holy Club*, 125.

point that it turned into a necessity for participation in a Methodist society. To be a Methodist implied that one associate with a week after week class meeting.

Classes were made up of between seven and twelve persons. Men and women often, but not always, met jointly in the same group. The group's leaders were of mixed gender as well and classes were set by geographical location. As far as the content or agenda of the weekly meetings, the class meeting focused on three concepts.

- Accountability to live out the General Rules as set by Wesley.
- To seek to give weekly to those who are living in poverty.
- Third, and most central to the time spent in the weekly meeting, it was a place where every Methodist answered the question, “How is it with your soul?” Methodist historian Scott Kisker has recently rephrased this question as “How is your life with God?”<sup>6</sup>

Wesley's original intention behind the class meeting was to create a vital evolving environment for mature believers to develop a system of accountability within the Methodist system to ensure holiness, growth, and ultimate sanctification during a believer's journey toward a perfect relationship with God through faith in Christ. This relationship would continuously remind the believer of his or her responsibility to God and the accountability to each other. The covenant group can be utilized in our current age to ensure accountability to the principles and practices that God deems as necessary. The very act of signing a contract emphasizes the importance that the forming disciple is attaching to a life lived out in love of God and love of neighbor. Finally, the small group creates an atmosphere for growth that is essential in this current technological age replete

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Watson, “The Heart of the Methodist Revival,” *Good News Magazine*, November 12, 2014, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://goodnewsmag.org/2014/11/the-heart-of-the-methodist-revival/>.



with eyes everywhere. Humans grow and develop by following the actions of others, not their talk.

What is interesting to note is what is not here is the study of scripture. Kevin M. Watson explains it this way, “These groups were not Bible studies. People did not study a book in these meetings. Among the purposes or goals of the class meeting, Wesley did not list the transfer of information from a perceived expert to a largely passive and ignorant audience.” He further states, “In other words, the class meeting was a very different kind of small group than the typical Sunday school class. Rather than being focused on transferring information or ideas about Christianity, the early Methodist class meeting focused on helping people come to know Jesus Christ and learn how to give every part of their lives to loving and serving Christ.”<sup>7</sup> This view by Watson suggests that knowing the Bible only does not bring about the lifestyle needed to meet the responsibility of the Christian faith.

A vital element to the re-structuring, re-tooling, and re-branding of the Methodist Class Meeting as the Covenant Discipleship Ministry is the actual contract. The commitment to each other and the promise to God that persons will join in a fellowship designed for the express purpose of establishing accountability concerning personal discipleship. Moreover, the establishment of the missions and the classes included in the covenant demands a focus on the exact means to express acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion. Society considers those things that are written and thus recorded as very important. It was essential to the Asbury family in 1866 that acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion become a necessary concern of the church as well as the

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<sup>7</sup> Watson, “Heart of the Methodist Revival.”

community. The actions of the membership would eventually develop into a covenant in which all could participate.

### *Wesleyan Covenant*

All believers are in search of an authentic relationship with persons and with God. Sondra Higgins Matthaei, Gayle Turner Watson, and David Lowes Watson correctly point to God as the genesis of the relationship between God and humankind in their work, which highlights the importance of covenant discipleship groups to the local church of this current age. Humankind seeks to authenticate their relationship with God through their relationships with other members of the society beginning in the home and continuing to the local community and the individual faith community. Moreover, we are social beings, and we seek a relationship, communion with one another and communion with God. The trust between God and human covers all areas and phases of life. The words of the hymn “they will know we are Christians by our love” ring true to the nature of our connections to God in the life of Jesus.

The authentic relationship between God and disciple develops to such an extent that the believer recognizes the fact that Jesus Christ is essential to the life of the believer. The believer understands that the plan of God for her or his life is not some elusive mission etched upon the sky. Instead, it is the idea of God for the disciple's life to be a plan developed by God and the disciple through the fellowship and communion of the authentic relationship with the living Christ. Moreover, every believer has been invited by God to service within a specific faith community. God through God's amazing grace has already provided the means to the relationship; it is God's grace. We are called to be

disciples, ministers, and servants. We have been given a specific faith to live out praxis of loving authentic service to God and our brothers and sisters in the faith. The Christian practice is to love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul; to love our neighbor as ourselves. The class groups of early Methodism may rightly serve as a valid example of authentic love and genuine fellowship in the development of authentic Christian disciples fulfilling the local church calling for this current age. The move to this authentic love was first received by John Wesley in his Aldersgate experience and relayed to the class groups who remained faithful to the church.

The author believes that for this relationship to be in full accord with the call of disciples to the work of Christ, that a renewal of the heart has to take place in each believer of the faith. To be renewed one has to understand the biblical principles to which they seek to fulfill. As it relates to Christianity, it recommends a return to the original state of Christ Holy Church. Any person who understands the New Testament and then compares that to Protestant Christianity can see the differences in the primitive and the contemporary church. All facets of primitive Christianity have endured changes to the desire for a personal liking. However, it is important to note that in some cases in the modern church many persons do not have a full understanding of the great commandment of Christ as stated in the Gospel of Matthew 20:19-20. Wesley was moved and shaped by his faith community through scripture, tradition, reason, and experience; these four factors shaped the framework of his ministry and influence Methodism to this current day.<sup>8</sup> Wesley influenced by his mother Susanna often challenged John concerning potentially leaning too much on his individual and personal wisdom and rationalization.

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<sup>8</sup> M. Douglas Meeks, *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985).

She challenged him to consider even his revelation as a gift from God or as God, God's self, speaking to his spirit. This consideration of the activity of the Holy Spirit has influence and consequence far beyond denominational authority.

Wesley's original intention behind the class meeting was to create a vital evolving environment for mature believers to develop a system of accountability within the Methodist system to ensure holiness, growth, and ultimate sanctification during a believer's journey toward a perfect relationship with God through faith in Christ. The small group and covenant group, suggesting a contractual aspect, were designed to ensure that the church's primary business was indeed about making disciples.

### *Understanding The Covenant*

David Lowes Watson in his book *Forming Christian Disciples* sites from Bishop McNeal Turner's book on Methodist Polity which says "Next to the word of God, Methodist ministers and class leaders should familiarize themselves with General Rules; is central to Methodism."<sup>9</sup> Good Methodists endeavor to do good, refrain from harming anyone, and attempt to stay in love with God through their spiritual and faith development. Turner continues, "No one observing the General Rules will ever lose membership in the church, the respect, and confidence of civil societies, nor a place at the right hand of God when done with earth."<sup>10</sup>

While salvation is a gift from God accomplished for humankind through the work of Christ alone, the only way one may attain this salvation is through faith alone.

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<sup>9</sup> David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation Through Mutual Accountability* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Watson, *Covenant Discipleship*, 19.

However, faith is evidence through transformative living embraced through obedience to the mandates of Jesus. “Good works are indeed not necessary to attain salvation because salvation is made possible through God's prevenient grace.”<sup>11</sup> Methodists recognize discipleship as the right belief consistently producing the proper Christ-like behavior, which covers thoughts, beliefs, and actions. Church members emphasizing anything other than Jesus Christ at the center and heart of all their spiritual efforts as believers miss the message of Christ.

Lacey Warner in an article written in the United Methodist Circuit Rider states, “John Wesley reflects near the end of his ministry in his sermon “Causes of the Inefficacies of Christianity.” The sermon opens with the assertion that Christian communities worldwide had done so little good because they produced so few real Christians. The sermon continues by outlining three characteristics Christians often lacked: (1) a sufficient understanding of doctrine, (2) adequate discipline, and (3) self-denial. Thus, according to Wesley, an inadequate view of salvation that was confined only to forgiveness of sins, in an antinomian posture, led Christian communities to nurture few real Christians. Warner says that a “similar concern for how we appropriate belief persists in the contemporary context.”<sup>12</sup> This project seeks to help the members of Asbury UMC embrace the fore mentioned characteristics and return to a time when the church lived out its mission in the City of Holly Springs Mississippi. The author asserts that the purpose of the church was to understand the church of which they joined, discipline themselves for service and deny themselves to uplift others.

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<sup>11</sup> Watson, *Covenant Discipleship*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Lacey C. Warner, *The Method of our Mission: United Methodist Polity and Organization* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014).

### *A Move to Renewal*

The history of the Methodist Classes has described several components that will guide in the development of this project. The first is the notion of renewal. Asbury will need to search itself to find harmony within the congregation and community. Harmony will help them to identify those who are committed to the work and redefine their goals by working together congregants and will be successfully aiding the school system of Holly Springs and Marshall County. Secondly, a move to remind the church of the early days of its ministry will be to help them rediscover their call to the work of Christ. The church has changed much and has drifted away from many of the kinds of ministries that help to develop the faith. Assisting Asbury to understand the fundamental dynamics of its early parishioners, will create a new sense of worth and empowerment. Thirdly, an understanding of the urgency to be the church, to serve people, to help those who are lost and lifting Christ will generate new energy that brings growth.

It is essential to understand Wesley's view of the church, (which would have been from the Anglican Tradition), to get a clear picture of his purpose in developing the Classes. According to David Watson,

Wesley's concept of the church underwent some changes during his life's work, but the underlying principle was always that of the 19<sup>th</sup> Article of the Church of England: 1. The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God preached and the sacraments duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. 2. As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred; so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies but also in matters of faith.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002).

The connection is that the church is continuously struggling to remain conscious of its purpose and the role of the believer. Therefore, some actions need to be taken to remind and help the church to regain its focus. The move away from early Christian demeanor is due to the various cultural changes, as stated above, which has an impact upon fundamental Christian belief.

Robert L. Wilson believes that:

Wesley's definition of the church without question and interpreted it in a way to suggest that the universal church are numerous churches. He was unwilling to make harsh judgments about particular expressions of the Christian faith and community. There is a spirit of inclusiveness in Wesley's understanding of the church, which is consistent with his theological conviction regarding people's capacity and freedom to respond to god.<sup>14</sup>

In his sermon, "Of the Church," Wesley interpreted Ephesians 4:1-6 as follows: "Here, then, is a clear unexceptionable answer to that question, "What is the Church?" The catholic or universal Church is all the persons in the universe whom God hath so-called out of the world as the entitle them to the proceeding character—as to be "one body," united by "one Spirit," having "one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all."<sup>15</sup> When the church moves into helping and loving the world, then the world sees them as the Body of Christ.

Historically we observed that the early classes indeed saw themselves as called disciples. John Wesley along with his brother Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist Movement, discovered themselves in situations similar to Asbury. They observed that the church was not involved in the practical work of Christ but rather most concern about the worship. To Wesley worship is the element that leads to the practice of

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Leroy Wilson, *Shaping the Congregation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1981), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, *Shaping the Congregation*.

ministry. When the church identifies its purpose, it will seek ways to implement that purpose. Worship motivates Christians to move beyond themselves in living what they believe. The fundamental reason for participation in worship is the hope of eternal life. A basic theme that runs through most religions is the possibility and nature of life after death. Religion also helps the individual through transitional periods of life such as the birth of a child, adulthood, marriage, and death. The congregation provides a supportive community, which can assist the individual at such times, sharing the joys as well as the sorrows.<sup>16</sup>

Again, the potential to regain a relationship with the community is possible. However, the congregation in itself will want to renew its understanding of the call of the church. The author agrees with Warner who says that it will require the three characteristics suggested by Wesley.<sup>17</sup> The first is to understand the doctrine. Christians should know the purpose for which they exist. Doctrine helps us to know Christ and to seek Him in our actions. To truly know Christ in our lives forces us outside of the comfort of worship and encourages us to see others and the needs of the world. Asbury and other congregations like it have come to rely on celebrations such as worship to identify their relationship with God. History teaches us that our celebrations should be those that reflect the work offered to God. We celebrate not only that we are kept in God's grace but rather what we have done in God's keeping of us.

The second characteristic Warner suggests is having adequate discipline. Wesley spent much time teaching the importance of discipline. The early covenant groups were

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<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *Shaping the Congregation*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Warner, *The Method of Our Mission*.



very intentional in their efforts to abide by a common discipline. Discipline is known as “Common Authority.” There must be some creed, text, person, or constitution to which the congregation ultimately appeals in time of internal crisis, something by which behavior and belief judged, something or someone which is the final arbiter. Discipline is more than mere bylaws or standard operating procedures. It is the guiding principles, purposes, and goals that name and guides a group. Discipline is what makes that gathering a specifically Christian gathering, and unites it in hope, mission, and vision with the church universal. Maintaining this discipline is difficult. Asbury as well as the larger denomination (United Methodist) has for decades followed the Disciplines of the Church but refused to consider any of them binding. Many congregations, unlike the early classes, stray away from the rules that set the church apart from other bodies of religion. The Bible is the most authoritative discipline in the church but even it is considered a flexible interpretive guide. To return to a state of renewal the church should reconsider its disciplines.

The third characteristic is self-denial. John Wesley states “On the whole, then, to deny ourselves, is, to deny our own will, where it does not fall in with the will of God; and that how pleasing it may be. It is, to deny ourselves any pleasure which does not spring from, and lead to, God; that is, in effect, to refuse going out of our way, though into the pleasant, flowery path; to refuse what we know to be a deadly poison, though agreeable to the taste.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “The Sermons of John Wesley – Sermon 48: Self-Denial,” The Wesley Center Online, accessed January 11, 2018, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-48-self-denial>.

Late in his life, at eighty-six-years old, Wesley completed a tour of Methodist societies in Ireland and England. He found a lack of missional vigor among the Methodist societies. In the sermon, Wesley subsequently published in the *Arminian Magazine*, “he attributed the current malaise to a lack of Christian discipline, self-denial, and increasing prosperity among the Methodists.”<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the importance of self-denial, Wesley wrote: Why has Christianity done so little good, even among us? Among the Methodists? Among them that hear and receive the whole Christian doctrine, and that have Christian discipline added to it, in the essential parts of it?<sup>20</sup> Plainly, because we have forgotten, or at least not duly attended to those solemn words of our Lord, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk. 9:23). It was the remark of a holy man several years ago, ‘Never was there before a people in the Christian church who had so much of the power of God among them, with so little self-denial.’ Indeed the work of God does go on, and in a surprising manner, notwithstanding this capital defect; but it cannot go on in the same degree as it otherwise would: neither can the word of God have its full effect unless the hearers of it “deny themselves, and take up their cross daily.”

Wesley defined self-denial to be “the denying or refusing to follow our own will, from a conviction that the will of God is the only rule of action to us. Moreover, we see the reason thereof because we are creatures; because ‘it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves’ (Psalm 100:3).” Wesley believed loving God with all the heart, soul, and

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<sup>19</sup> “The Sermons of John Wesley,” The Wesley Center Online, accessed January 11, 2018, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-48-self-denial>.

<sup>20</sup> Steve Manskar, “Atonement and the Method of Methodism Part 2: Self-Denial,” Equipping Disciples: A Discipleship Ministries Blog, April 14, 2014, accessed July 27, 2018, <https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/atonement-and-the-method-of-methodism-part-2-self-denial/>.

mind required for humanity to set aside their will in favor of the will of the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

If humanity truly love God, then they will set aside their ways in support of God's. Such self-denial is born of faith in God who created and redeemed humanity. When one practices self-denial, they open their hearts to the Holy Spirit who works in them to root out the remnants of inbeing sin and restore the image of Christ so that love can reign in their hearts. Practicing self-denial leads to holiness of heart and life. For Wesley self-denial was of great importance.

Love necessarily requires self-denial. It is essential for any significant relationship. One must understand that practicing self-denial does not mean that Jesus expects his followers to be "doormats." It does not mean that Christians must allow others to take advantage of or abuse them. Self-denial means that one must put the needs and interests of others ahead of their own. Jesus illustrates in Luke 10:30-37, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, he tells the story of a man from Samaria traveling on the Jericho road.<sup>22</sup> When Christ encountered a man, who had been robbed, beaten and left to die He stopped to help. He cleaned and bound the man's wounds and took him to a local inn. Before continuing his journey, the Samaritan gave the Inn Keeper money to cover the cost of caring for the man, with the promise of more upon his return.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Manskar, "Atonement and the Method of Methodism Part 2," accessed July 27, 2018, <https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/atonement-and-the-method-of-methodism-part-2-self-denial/>.

<sup>22</sup> Manskar, "Atonement and the Method of Methodism Part 2," accessed July 27, 2018, <https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/atonement-and-the-method-of-methodism-part-2-self-denial/>.

<sup>23</sup> Manskar, "Atonement and the Method of Methodism Part 2," accessed July 27, 2018, <https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/atonement-and-the-method-of-methodism-part-2-self-denial/>.

The members of the Holy Clubs and Early Covenant groups realized that they were without the true religion of God until they had received His presence. They gradually came to realize that salvation was a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.<sup>24</sup>

It was Wesley's feeling that every member should feel responsible for every other member. When a friend suggested that every group should have a strong leader, Wesley replied, "No, that would give him too much to do and the rest of us too little."<sup>25</sup> Natural leadership did emerge from these groups. These leaders became quite central to the Methodist movement. Wesley's strong view still stands that every member should be involved in the work of the church for the completion of salvation.

### **Conclusion**

Much of the success and effectiveness of the early classes resulted from the high sense of responsibility each member assumed for every other member and the group as a whole. Outler points out that it was in the bands and classes that people who were worthless in the streets outside the church found respect, dignity and a new vision of God and the human possibility. From the example of the classes, Asbury perhaps can find renewal as it searches for ways to reconnect with the community of Holly Springs. The practices of the early classes reveal progress when members seek the calling of Christ.

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<sup>24</sup> Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1964), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 5-6.

These practices are worth rediscovering in any congregation which has lost its way in a culture that has and is rapidly changing.

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “It is becoming clearer every day that the most urgent problem besetting our Church is this: How can we live the Christian life in the modern world?”<sup>26</sup> John Wesley recognized the high cost of discipleship and sought to fashion a structure within the Christian community providing spiritual growth for persons trying to live the Christian life in the midst of what was for them a new and challenging modern world. The goal of Asbury and other churches in decline is to return that very nature which pleases God and seek to live in harmony with God’s people. New directions charted, and old ideas will live again in the life of those called by the great God of restoration.

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<sup>26</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1966), 14.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

This chapter will discuss how God renews His people to the newness of the Cross of Christ. When renewed to the cross of Christ, the restored life seeks to do the will of God. Asbury United Methodist Church is a body of Christ in need of renewal. The congregation has abandoned its calling to aid in educating the community. From the beginning of its history, the church not only made disciples for Christ but was instrumental in developing a college that continues to exist today. The author feels that it would benefit the body to revisit the early concepts of the church, in order to refocus on a ministry that will help to reconnect the church to the community. Renewal theology allows congregations like Asbury to identify the heart of its mission and to revise an interest to move out into the world. The concept of moving out into the world will help the church to grow in faith and mission.

The Bible gives us our most precise picture of renewal. Israel repeatedly departs from God's Commandments. "You stubborn people! In your thoughts and hearing, you are like those who have had no part in God's covenant! You continuously set yourself against the Holy Spirit, just like your ancestors did. Was there a single prophet your ancestors did not harass? They even murdered those who anticipated the coming of the righteous one, and you've betrayed and murdered him! You received the Law given by angels, but you have not kept it" (Act 7:51-53). Acts 7 speaks to the inability of the

people to remain faithful to God and questions if anyone believes in the law. We see that the Bible spoke to many events when God's people were called to a time of renewal. Not only did people turn in disobedience from God but they many times refused to hear and acknowledge the presence of God.

Randy Maddox in his book *Responsible Grace* speaks of the Methodist Covenant Renewal Service. The purpose of the service is to provide "a setting for (1) recurrent recognition and confession of our failures to live responsibly within our restored relationship to God, (2) an affirmation of God's faithfulness and forgiveness, and (3) the renewal of our commitment, based on God's gracious empowering."<sup>1</sup>

The basic idea of renewal is that the church has drifted away from God and God's design. Renewal is covertly present in all situations of life. What the author means by this is that people from the earliest starting point of creation have always strayed far from the methods for God, in this way waiting to come back to the right association with God. God in His omnipotent intelligence initiates the procedure of reclamation. People are then urged to renew their comprehension of the things that satisfies God. I project that renewal is a process and when followed the church carefully will rediscover the will of God in their lives.

This concepts and the theology to of John Wesley, the founder of the Wesleyan movement, will be used to describe and explain why the author believes that renewal is needed for members of congregations to refocus on the original purpose of the mission of the church. John Wesley's theology and the doctrine of justification speak to the process in which one should consider, in order to understand the role of the believer in his or her

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<sup>1</sup> Randy L. Maddox and John Wesley, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 210-211.

acceptance of salvation. Salvation in itself is a restorative act of renewal given by grace, which is an act of God.

The Reverend John Wesley was born June 17, 1703, the fifteenth of nineteen children of the Reverend Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel was controversial because of his political leanings. Locals mocked his children, burned the family crops, and damaged the rectory of the Epworth Anglican Parish in Lincolnshire, England.

John Wesley graduated from Oxford University and became a priest in the Church of England in 1728. Beginning in 1729, he participated in the Holy Club, a religious study group organized by his brother Charles (1707-1788).

Methodist were criticized for the exact way in which they committed themselves to their faith. United by a sincere covenant, they visited those in prison, gave support to the poor, looked after orphans and sick persons all while emphasizing personal and social holiness.

A turning point in Wesley's life followed a two-year missionary trip (1735-1737) to Savannah, GA. On May 24, 1738, Wesley, then thirty-four, attended a Moravian service at Aldersgate Street in London. Listening to the reading of Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, he heard an explanation of faith and the doctrine of justification by faith. "I felt my heart strangely warmed," he wrote. "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins."<sup>2</sup>In 1739, Wesley accepted an invitation from his friend George Whitefield to preach in the open air to miners near Bristol. He said he had "till very lately" considered preaching outside a pulpit as "almost a sin." The miners' response led him to preach outside the

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick A. Dreyer, *The Genesis of Methodism* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1999), 27.



church often to working-class people who found a little welcome in established churches. Other Anglican clergy refused to follow his example, so Wesley allowed lay people to preach and teach.<sup>3</sup>

In 1743, as the number of societies grew, Wesley prepared “General Rules” for the societies. They became the nucleus of the Methodist *Discipline*. The breach between Wesley and the Church of England gradually widened, but he never considered his societies to be outside the Anglican Church. After Anglican clergy fled America during the Revolution, Wesley was faced with caring for some 15,000 followers there. The Bishop of London refused to ordain any clergy for him, so Wesley ordained ministers on his authority, an essential step in the creation of the Methodist Church in America.

Wesley is believed to have traveled more than 250,000 miles and to have preached more than 40,000 times. He died in 1791.

Several concepts of Wesley's theology are congruent to this project as one seeks a practice of ministry that will lead to accomplishing goals and objectives. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the following principles of Wesleyan Theology.

### *Triune God*

The nature of God is such that God can only be expressed regarding a Triune. Of course, trying to define God is to do the impossible. Two particular natures of God demand to be mentioned but, even then, both of these are related, if not the same. They are relational, relationship, and, love. God is by nature even in a relationship with God's self. God is defined in relational terms of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each then is

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<sup>3</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2014), Kindle, 1147.

defined regarding the other two thus giving meaning to "one and yet three." Father is a creator; maker of us all and the universe; giver of life; judge of all things, yet using the standard of fatherly love in all things. Son is God's revelation to humankind of God's self. When one has seen the Son, one has seen God. Son is a revelation; teacher; example; loves us so much God was even willing to take our sins upon Himself; forgiver and redeemer; one of us. Holy Spirit is God as empowered and enabler; God present with us still; giver of (spiritual) gifts; God enlivening our lives

There is no doubt that the original members of Asbury understood to some degree the nature of God about not only God but the impact of this relationship on their own lives. Relationship compels the believer to seek others and to build fellowships of mutual affection. This mutual fellowship led to the development of a vital congregation and a school for those needing educating. The project will help congregations regain an understanding of their role and the need to be the enabler of ministry to the community. Before renewal can take place, the church will need to reach back and bring forth the passion for ministry first held by the early founders of the body.

### *Grace*

"Wesley orients his formulations of the doctrines of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit about one central theme, the salvation of men's souls. Hence there is philosophical speculation about the divine nature, while the love of God in saving grace alludes to countless times."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps John Wesley's greatest contributions to Christianity were his thoughts and teaching regarding grace. His beliefs concerning soteriology are that God

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings*, vols. 1-4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 43.

acts upon us from birth until the grave, renewing us even into the image of God's self. The fall of humankind in original sin necessitates God acting through grace to convict, pardon, and then continue to re-make us even into God's image, expressed as a love of God and love of neighbor. This is a change brought about by the grace of God and our faith expressed in belief. Salvation is something one can know or be assured of, although, different people will experience salvation at different times in their faith journey (and may never have that assurance of salvation). Faith is the basis for justification and sanctification, and works are not required to obtain either, but the response in works of piety and mercy are required even to maintain the grace already received. Initially, salvation is an act of orthodoxy (right belief), but it is ultimately orthopraxy (right practice). Belief requires good works not because works saves but rather because belief requires the renewing work of transformation. Salvation has both an individual and communal understanding and thus has social ramifications. As the sanctification of the individual is ultimately the re-imaging of the individual into the image of God, so the sanctification of the community is also the re-imaging of all society into the image that God has designed. Thus, God acts from birth until death eventually transforming to Christian perfection.

This "going on to perfection" can perhaps be best understood by an understanding of prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. Through prevenient grace God pricks everyone's heart, and one becomes aware of nature and how unable and undeserving humanity is to change self. God convicts our need for redemption brought about by the pardoning and re-imaging of self by God. Humanity sees sin and hopelessness. Humanity know there is no way that they on own can change themselves. They are doomed to

everlasting damnation and are not capable of redeeming self or changing the direction of their lives. It is from within this pit that God can transform humanity. God does have an alternative way to live in the present and one can live differently because of what God has planned. Wesley put it this way, “we can arrive at an understanding of the divine purpose in the original creation.”<sup>5</sup> When one realizes their condition and inability to change, prevenient grace opens one to hearing God's transforming powers. Humanity believes, and in believing, they have faith. It is through faith one accepts God's love, forgiveness, and redemption. According to Wesley, this is called justifying or transforming grace. One continues transforming until death and reimagining into the image of God. Wesley said, “Ye know that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God.”<sup>6</sup> This love by God prompts the response of loving your neighbor. It is always in a community where fully hear God, see God acting, and respond to God. Christianity requires community. Even in God's person, this relationship is as expressed in the Trinity. God loves and has done the redemptive work for us through Jesus Christ; through grace we are first made aware of God's existence, even. God loved humanity even before they knew there was a God and even while they were yet sinners; he loved them. God has never stopped loving humanity and never will. He has loved humanity so much that he sent his Son, taking a human form, living and walking, and teaching, and then in dying took the sins of all humankind upon himself. God has already done all that is required for humanity's redemption. The only thing lacking is for one to have faith in what God has done, is doing, and will do.

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<sup>5</sup> John Wesley and Albert Cook Outler, *The Works of John Wesley, 34-70* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 185.

<sup>6</sup> Wesley and Outler, *The Works of John Wesley, 34-70*, 185.

Faith believes and believing is faith. Wesley recalled Peter Bohler telling him.

"Preach faith till you have it, and then because you have it, you will preach faith "<sup>7</sup>

Asbury and congregations in decline, have a misconception of God's grace. Grace is not a cover for not responding to the love of God, but a reminder of how God expects the church to share grace with others. The project will help to remind the church that grace continues and is waiting for the congregation to respond by doing God's will. Asbury does not see grace beyond itself and must renew their understanding God's grace to move into the future. Lovelace speaks of this lack of understanding as a dynamic of individual renewal. He states, "The Christian who "invents' good works or ascetic practices apart from the ordinary path of obedience to God's Word and Spirit, listening for the ring of a heavenly cash register of merits, is building on illusion. In the same way, the liberal Protestant, who thinks and acts and votes out of a proper concern for justice, but does so with a hidden pride of achievement, with not awareness of the depth of sin, will be spiritually cold and hard."<sup>8</sup> Many churches like Asbury have come to a place of complacency. The project will encourage the congregation to reach out to others and especially in seeking to restore compassion to the original call of ministry.

### *Faith*

"Faith is a matter of transformation - personal, social, and world transformation."<sup>9</sup>

Faith is central to Wesleyan theology. It is the only requirement for justification and

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<sup>7</sup> Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings*, 84.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 132.

<sup>9</sup> Wesley and Outler, *Works of John Wesley*, Sermon 4.

sanctification, as works are not a requirement for either. Faith is the sole requirement. Thus, as in the deathbed conversion, someone can be justified and sanctified instantaneously and without works. However, perhaps it would be impossible to maintain that sanctification without works after that.

This renewal or transformation, which Christians call justification, is also something that can be experienced. It is something known, which involves emotions, senses, mental capacities, and spiritual beings. It is also something that can be felt, experienced, personalized, and involved. It is firsthand knowledge, a sense of being new and different. It is more than an intellectual, cerebral, rational, mental experience. Wesley wrote, "Salvation is not the soul is going to paradise. It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing."<sup>10</sup> It is the understanding that the kingdom of God has come now into one's heart and mind and they have the opportunity to live in this kingdom. Christians can have the assurance of salvation and the peace that comes only from a God who has justified them although it is not a requirement for salvation.

### *Perfection*

Wesley's understanding of perfection and works often put him at odds with his contemporaries. Although salvation is by faith alone, he also believed there was no way one could have faith and not respond to that faith. He said salvation is turning to God and the beginning of a long process of re-imagining and society into the image of God. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, one can be re-oriented and remade into what God originally intended. This re-orientation and being remade into the image of God is the

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<sup>10</sup> Wesley and Outler, *Works of John Wesley*, Sermon 4, 3.

“going on to perfection.” It is a process that is brought about by a combination of works of piety such as prayer, Lord’s supper, reading, hearing and meditating on the word, fasting, works of mercy, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, healing the sick, teaching and educating, seeking employment for the unemployed. However, Wesley reasoned, “It is much more properly a 'gift' that is graciously evoked in our lives by the pardoning overtures of God.”<sup>11</sup> Salvation is something that involves the individual in relationship with God and requires one to seek justice for all the people of God.

### *Justification*

Justification, wrote Wesley, is another word for pardon.<sup>12</sup> Pardoning relieves from past sins, but it requires one to go forth living differently. It is not to go live the same old ways, but instead, now to live in a way that does not require one to be pardoned again. This requires humanity to live differently as individuals in the community. Therefore, religion becomes a social religion. Wesley in Sermon Twenty-Four wrote, “Christianity is essentially a social religion.”<sup>13</sup> It is impossible to separate one's own salvation from that of the renewal of community. Christians cannot be renewed as individuals without also being renewed in the community (love of neighbor). Wesley even said that one could not even “retain the grace which God has already given” us unless we are “zealous of good works.”<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way: “Christian community is like the

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<sup>11</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 173.

<sup>12</sup> Wesley and Outler, *Works of John Wesley*, Sermon 43.

<sup>13</sup> Wesley and Outler, *Works of John Wesley*.

<sup>14</sup> Wesley and Outler, *Works of John Wesley*.

Christian's sanctification. It is a gift of God which we cannot claim.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, things like medical care for the poor, feeding the hungry, caring for the widows, teaching people to read and write, teaching job skills, justice for all the oppressed, whether they are slaves, women, or the social outcasts, all become things the Christian must be involved.

Salvation is a personal relationship with God, which then is a personal relationship with all of God's creatures. This also must be expanded to all of nature including the environment and all God's little creatures in nature. Although salvation is something that in a moment can be given in justifying grace, it is also something that requires an ongoing relationship and an ongoing striving to respond to God's love. Wesley continually emphasized that Christians are not saved by works but rather only by faith, but he also said that the works are required to remain in grace. It is not that one earns anything but rather it is more proof that they have accepted this justifying grace and because of that acceptance they respond in love. If faith is genuine then the response to God's love is inevitable. Christians are to respond with all types of works expressed in love of neighbors.

This universal understanding of community and neighbor leads one out of the pews and into the streets. Out of this new way of living comes a social creed, and no matter how controversial it may be, it gives a far greater vision for the world. It pushes one to look beyond the four walls of the church into an ever-widening universe and community of God. The secular life and religious life cannot be separated but instead, becomes one. Christians can no longer say that the injustice done to brothers and sisters somewhere around the world is not our problem or concern. True one cannot change or

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<sup>15</sup> Renate Wind, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).



re-image the whole world by themselves, but they can be more aware and attuned to those things that can be change. Wesley was unique in that he called the church to look beyond its fortresses and beyond those people who only looked like themselves. For many in the existing church, this came as a shock, and many did not accept the fact that the poor, the outcast are to be part of this community of God. So too, today, many have in some ways returned to the pew rather than taking the pew to the street Wesley is still right today.

Social justice is an indispensable key to soteriology. Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith and the Moravians "quietism" had their effects on Wesleyan thoughts, but John Wesley, like today, broke from them in saying that justification by faith was the only thing needed to also go on to sanctification. Wesley put it this way: "the great salvation could not stop short of a renewal of that original vocation for which humanity was created, to live as the image of God in the world."<sup>16</sup> Salvation, therefore, is a journey going on to perfection. It is possible for each to be perfected in the love of God. This can only come about through the acts of piety and acts of mercy mediated through sanctifying grace. Wesley never claimed anyone had reached perfection, but he insisted that we can, and each should be striving for this perfection in their life. The term "Christian Perfection" was "meant to describe both the process and its goal, perfecting and bringing to completion the renewal begun in regeneration."<sup>17</sup> Of course, love is the end goal of sanctification. This includes the love of God and love of neighbor. Again, orthodoxy and orthopraxy are required of the believer. It is a constant journey. As faith

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<sup>16</sup> Theodore Runyon, *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1985), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Runyon, *Wesleyan Theology Today*, 82.

deepens so must the practice. As practice and works bring on a more in-depth understanding and faithfulness, the belief in and about God deepens. The farther along this faith journey one is, the more they become aware of their own shortcomings of faith, hope, and love. If a cyclic journey that takes a life full of all the ordinances of God to completion. Even then it is only through faith and the grace of God that one may start or continue the journey.

Wesley believed the Kingdom of God has come upon the earth. It is not an outward thing but instead is written upon the hearts and minds of those who have been justified. It is a kingdom that has come, is coming and will come. "We see a beginning or tip of the kingdom when the loving knowledge of God, producing uniform, uninterrupted holiness, and happiness, shall cover the earth."<sup>18</sup> Wesley wrote the great end of religion is "to renew our hearts in the image of God."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Christians live in the kingdom and are being renewed in the image of God in this kingdom. They work to bring this kingdom and God's justice to all the people of the earth. In Sermon Seven, Wesley said it this way; "God sets up his throne in our hearts."<sup>20</sup> He spoke of the image of God is a relationship between God and humanity and, because of the relationship; they are changed in all that they do. The kingdom has come and yet Christians also strive to bring it fully into the present with the help of God. The world is in sin, but Christians are justified through faith and, consequently, work with God to bring God's holiness into all of God's creation and thus are re-imaging this entire world into the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>18</sup> Wesley and Outler, *Works of John Wesley*, Sermon 63.

<sup>19</sup> Wesley and Outler, *Works of John Wesley*, Sermon 44.

<sup>20</sup> John Wesley and Edward Holdsworth, *John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 106.

However, through all of God's graciousness, humanity has the freedom to turn away or to choose God's way. God has given the freedom to accept or reject God's self. God, through prevenient grace always calls humanity to return but they are given that freedom to act with or against God.

### *Spiritual Formation*

Spiritual formation is defined as: "Christian Spiritual Formation is the process of by which persons are fashioned, conformed, and renewed into the likeness of Christ. However, author would add emphasis to what is implied, which is the Resurrected Christ in them should necessarily include the Wesleyan understanding of "going on to perfection in this lifetime."<sup>21</sup>

Although humanity fell by original sin, they can be put back into the original image that God designed or imagined at creation, this requires at least two things. First, that God is indeed an active God and through His Holy Spirit is enabling and empowering humanity to be changed during this mortal existence. God has not wound up the universe and now takes a nap God is alive in each individual. Secondly, to say that one can be anything other than perfected by the love of God would be to deny the power, ability, and the intention of God. God is about renewing us, re-creating us in God's own image. This image is what is meant when we say the kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ. God does not desire for humanity to be remodeled with a little of the old and a little of the new. God desires us to be wholly renewed in God.

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<sup>21</sup> Wesley and Holdsworth, *John Wesley's*, 509.

Means of grace are those means (things, thoughts, and events) that God uses to bestow grace. God, in fact, uses every available means to attract attention, to shower us with His love and grace, and to impart every good thing. God even takes bad things (accidents, disease, crime, war, etc.) and uses them to grace us. “It was Wesley's conviction that without regular use of the means of grace our relationship with God will be short-lived” (Job 91).

Works of piety (prayer, Lord's Supper, reading and hearing scripture, meditation, fasting) are ways that God imputes grace. Works of mercy (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those in hospitals and prisons, providing shelter, etc.) are ways in which we share this love and grace. The understanding of prevenient grace, justifying grace and sanctifying (perfecting) grace all comes as a result of some means of grace whereby God has showered humanity with God's self. One should be intentionally participating in these means of grace. However, this terminology is not used in everyday life and work of the church. Stokes, for instance, fails to use these words and fails to make the point that these are indeed means of grace. He refers to disciplined living, habits, empowerment, method, and putting oneself in a position to see them and, although he lists some means of grace, he fails the reader in understanding how these two mutually lift the other.<sup>22</sup> The author believes this terminology needs to be reclaimed in the pew. Christians live in a different age than the church often perceives itself of being in. We no longer live in the age of Christendom. This is a new era, and the church must find new ways of doing ministry. Meade wrote, “In the age of Christendom, the work of theology became more and more an enterprise of the academy and its professions and less and less

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<sup>22</sup> Mack B. Stokes, *Major United Methodist Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 78-84.

relevant to everyday life ... In the new ecclesia, the primary theologians have to be the laity because they are on the missionary frontier.”<sup>23</sup> In another of his books, he adds, “I do not believe the gospel itself changes. But to be faithful to that unchanging gospel in a changing world, I have to pay a lot of attention to what is changing around me.”<sup>24</sup>

Leonard Lovett wrote, “Because we are citizens of two worlds, there is a sense in which we live 'between the times.' Our dual citizenship informs the judgments and norms we render.”<sup>25</sup> Not only has the era changed but also the laity does the majority of the ministry in places outside the formal church boundaries.

Wesley’s theology revolves around a concept that encourages the Christian to live a life that focused on the teachings of the early church. These concepts are Pietistic and Evangelical. His view influenced the world and led to a renewal of the church. Wesley was practically interested in those who desired to live as faithful followers of Christ while maintaining a close relationship with the Church of England. Wesley’s theological vision is that Christians should practice what they profess. In Randy Maddox’s *Responsible Grace* he states that Wesley’s theology is a practical theology because it was about “nurturing and shaping the worldview that frames the temperament and practice of believer’s lives in the world.”<sup>26</sup> The renewal of the church is possible because

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<sup>23</sup> Loren B. Meade, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier (Once and Future Church Series)* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1991), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Loren B. Meade, *Transforming Congregations for the Future (Once and Future Church Series)* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1995), 103.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard Lovett, *Opening the Front Door of Your Church* (Lanham, MD: Pneuma Life Publishing, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Gregory S. Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), Kindle, locations 2031-2033.

congregations are willing to work and serve Christ by responding to others. This was the idea behind Wesley's effort to make those of the body aware of accountability. Christian accountability helps to shape priority in order to give meaning to the body of Christ.

There is a significant tendency to relegate Wesley's theology to that of practice, but Wesley warned that to focus on the practice of ministry only is missing the point of true Christian purpose. One must not only practice ministry, but the motivation must come from the heart. Gregory S. Clapper states that "No matter how compelling and complete the practice appears to be, if it is not done with the goal of either growing or expressing our gratitude for salvation, our joy in being rightly-related to God, our love for God and neighbor, it has not achieved its purpose."<sup>27</sup> As Wesley said in his sermon "The Way to the Kingdom"

Yea, two persons may do the same outward work—suppose, feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked—and in the meantime one of these may be genuinely religious, and the other have no religion at all; for the one may act from the love of God, and the other from the love of praise. So manifest is it that although true religion naturally leads to every right word and work, yet the real nature thereof lies deeper still, even in the 'hidden man of the heart.'<sup>28</sup>

Clapper continues "Of some help in seeing the potentially crucial difference between an orientation of "practices" and orientation of "heart holiness" is the distinction that the philosopher Robert C. Roberts makes between virtues related to the will and motivational virtues."<sup>29</sup>

Bishop William Ragsdale Cannon in his book *The Theology of John Wesley, With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification*, says that "man's works are the living

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<sup>27</sup> Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 2105.

<sup>28</sup> Wesley and Holdsworth. *John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons*, 509.

<sup>29</sup> Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 2105-2111.

portrait of God's grace."<sup>30</sup> He continues, "The man who is finally accepted of God is he who believes in Christ with a loving and obedient heart, and exercises that belief in deeds of kindness and love. If faith produces works, then work in turn support faith, yea, even bring it to glorious fruition in human life"<sup>31</sup> The imperative here is that God blesses the work, but He is most interested in the relationship which requires an inward response. The responses of the heart bring the believer to a closer walk with God.

Asbury UMC is in need of renewing the original call of the church. One way to begin this process is to recall the Wesleyan roots and to be reminded of those things that make Methodism unique. A Wesleyan understanding of sanctifying grace, where the entire community is called to be re-created in the image of God, has been at the very heart of the Methodist movement from its conception. This necessitates two theological understandings that may be missing within this church. First, God has already taken the initiative and continues to work to perfect us in love in this lifetime. The second theological understanding is that this new creation takes place within the entire community and requires not only the individual to be reconciled with God, but also that Christians are reconciled with their neighbor which constitutes the entire community.

Wesley suggests that members follow specific rules that hold them accountable to their Christian commitment. Following these rules will result in works of piety or practice of ministry. Asbury could return to a time discernment in which the rules of the early classes could be beneficial to the restoration of the church. The congregation has lost its

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<sup>30</sup> William Ragsdale Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley, With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 150.

<sup>31</sup> Cannon, *Theology of John Wesley*, 150.

calling to serve the community. Therefore, reclaiming its past and realizing its present will aid them in an effort to move forward.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Renewal is an act of restoration. When an institution seeks to rebuild itself, it sometimes reflects on its past. An organization's history can give clarity as to how it became what it is and can redirect thoughts as to how to move forward into the future. The church has often reviewed its past to discover ways to enhance the work of the church and to encourage congregants to participate in the overall ministry of the church. In all organized groups, some components depict the image of those groups past. Some of those essential components are forgotten. Therefore, a time of remembering original institutional ideas can be vital to future growth and life of the institution.

Since the dawn of the Christian Church, renewal and restoration have shown to be of great concern. The church has struggled to maintain the fundamental founding principles that differentiate it from the world. Those who lead the church have found it difficult to guide the body of Christ in biblical contexts that clash with contemporary social changes. The Christian Church has become institutionalized and functions in ways that are similar to large cooperation's. Therefore, the church seeks to please society or its clients rather than attempting to understand its purpose to please the Creator. For organizational purposes, there is nothing wrong with the church operating as a business, but there is a danger of losing values that supersede worldly decision-making processes.

The church's responsibility is to spread the good news of God in Christ to persons who will receive the message and who in turn will share the message with others.

Church Renewal is an ongoing process and has attracted the attention of many groups, pastors and writers. The Restoration Movement, for example, was a movement of renewal. The theoretical context of the initial years of the American republic provided a growing environment for the development of new religious movements. The spirit and distrust of religious traditions gave rise to a challenge of traditional orthodoxies of the time. A growing concern among several religious groups was that the divisions and the confusion of Protestant churches were a result of departing from the methods and instructions of the apostolic faith. The denominational church had become dependent on human-made traditions. What was needed was to return to the plain teachings of scripture.

Four pioneers would seek to lead persons back to the primitive way of Christian life. Burton Stone, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott, all of the Presbyterian background, are credited with the founding of the Restoration Movement. Three congregations formed as a result of the Restoration Movement, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The Christian Church, and the Church of Christ. Their main theological concern was that Christian Religion had departed from the primitive ways of the early church and sought to renew the acts of the early church.

Again, renewal means restoring the church to the full purposes and provisions and designs of the early church followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus created the church according to the plan that God the Father prescribed to Him. Renewing the church is not something that is motivated by persons of the church, but rather something that God does through

His people if they are willing to allow God to do it. The Holy Spirit is the central factor in the renewal of the church. In this sense, the church is prepared to be used by the Lord, but God is the one doing the work.

The problem is that there are a large number of congregations which are in decline within the United Methodist Church. Many of these churches include the African American congregation which only constitutes less than 30% of the total membership of the denomination. Some of these churches are vital to the community in which they exist but are not growing. A significant number of them are disengaged from the community and look to do service to the people as opposed to cooperate to assist. The church should find ways to include the outside community in the ministries of the congregation.

If churches are in decline, the indication is that they are unhealthy. An unhealthy congregation is in need of renewal. Several causes affect the health of a church; therefore, it would be almost impossible to address every individual part of the church thoroughly. Mark Dever, says, “A healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God’s character as his character revealed in his Word.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, while that definition is good, it is limited and leaves many opportunities for individual interpretation. The significance of this definition found in Dever’s emphasis on increasingly reflecting God’s character. This notion indicates that to reflect on God’s character the church must return to the origin of that knowledge. God’s character is revealed in the Word of God and thus requires careful study. In his book, *Minding the Good Ground*, Jason Vickers takes us

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Dever, *What is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

back to the question of the nature of the church, he centers renewal on the Holy Spirit, and not in name only. The temptation is “to leave God out of the equation.”<sup>2</sup>

Another leader in renewal ministries and concepts is Richard F. Lovelace. In his book *Renewal As a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth*, he assesses a standard model of revival by J. Edwin Orr based on expressions of the Spirit in Acts the first and second chapters, and poises this model with the Old Testament occurrences of the return to God’s law under Josiah and Hezekiah. He reviews several periods of awakenings in Christian history. His reason in surveying these biblical and historical occurrences is to help the modern church to position itself “for a level of renewal suitable to a new and ongoing endowing of the Spirit,”<sup>3</sup> believing that future awakenings “are unlikely to occur without the full consolidation and realization in the church of those elements that have appeared in the past.”<sup>4</sup> He acknowledges that “renewal is God’s sovereign work and not conditional on a comprehensive understanding of any set of principles.”<sup>5</sup>

Lovelace offers an informative look at “Biblical Models of Cyclical and Continuous Renewal,” of both Old and New Testaments, he explains to “search out theological explanations for the phenomenon of decline and revival in the church’s

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<sup>2</sup> Jason E. Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 46-48.

<sup>5</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 82.

history.”<sup>6</sup> Through this evaluation, Lovelace develops his model of the “Dynamics of Spiritual Life.” This model encompasses three main areas:

1. Preconditions of renewal, or the preparation for the Gospel:  
This comprises first, the mindfulness of the holiness of God shown in his justice and his love. Out of this grows awareness of the seriousness of sin in one’s life and community.
2. Major features of renewal, or a depth demonstration of the Gospel:  
This focuses on the essential components of our life “in Christ” as conveyed through the biblical concepts of justification (you are accepted), sanctification (you are free from bondage to sin), the indwelling Spirit (you are not alone), and authority in spiritual conflict (you have authority)
3. Secondary elements of renewal, or the outworking of the Gospel in the church’s life:

This model looks at five expressions from those who experience the primary aspects of renewal. These are as follows;

1. A commitment to Mission: Jesus states in Matthew 28: 19-20,

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.

The church is called to follow Christ into the world and present His gospel in proclamation and social demonstration.

2. A commitment to Prayer: Expressing dependence on the power of his Spirit both individually and corporately. The body of Christ is expected to render itself to the power that exists through the Holy Spirit.
3. A commitment to Community: Believers should be willing to be in union with the body of Christ within and outside the church.
4. A commitment to Disen-culturation: The church often finds itself obligated to allow culture to dictate the direction of the body. But members should be free from cultural blinds that are destructive to theology and the need to take protective measures to guard against such detractions. Sometimes congregations are bogged down in trying to be culturally correct rather than spiritually directed.

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<sup>6</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 72.

5. A commitment to Theological integration: This is having the mind of Christ toward revealed truth and one's culture. Christ must direct the church in maintaining the proper relationship with the community. In many cases, the church abides in the mindset of the society which undermines the work of the church. The church becomes dependent upon society for support, therefore, rendering over important theological perspectives imperative to the Christian witness of the church. For instance, the United Methodist Church is considering gay liberation and the possibility of ordaining persons of the Gay lifestyle.

The very notion of these considerations puts the denomination in danger of losing persons who do not wish to conform to those social views. Lovelace believes that:

Enculturation is the net result of the church's failure to understand and appropriate the primary and secondary elements of renewal which define the meaning of fullness of life in Christ. It almost inevitably appears over a period in which any of these dynamics is substantially missing in the church. It is a kind of rust which forms on the surface of the church's witness and clouds the glory which ought to shine from it to illuminate the nations. At its worst, it destroys the church's life. At best, it freezes the form of the church and produces a sanctified out- of- datedness which the world can easily learn to ignore. In periods of awakening, the church is all growth and movement as new and creative surrounding culture. With the onset of spiritual decline, the church's expression ceases to be creative and becomes mere rehearsal of the forms that once, expressed life and spoke to the world with arresting power.<sup>7</sup>

The author agrees with Lovelace that congregations must find a way back to above mentioned five areas of commitment. Asbury has shifted from a calling that leads them to build a college to a time of cultural complacency. The Lovelace model would be a great place to begin encouraging a movement of renewal within the church. Asbury must determine how its mission compares to the purpose of Christ. The church is in need of a return to spiritual renewal to restore the spiritual connection with God. Reconnecting with the community is essential to identify the various needs of the city.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 197.

According to church planter and Pastor Daniel Brown, “renewal means to become right for a new era. In a broad sense, to renew the ministry of a church is to help that church recapture the essence of its life and identity while expressing that life in a way that is relevant to the needs of its members and community today.”<sup>8</sup> According to Brown, “the focus should not be that churches have been wrong all these years, and therefore need renewal, but that they must be revitalized, or renewed, to be right for the new era in which they now live and serve.”<sup>9</sup> This view is a significant point as we move closer to a model of renewal for Asbury. The question is where does the church need to be in the future? Does it feel a need to consider its present reality as a wake-up call to change? Asbury and most congregations like it see themselves as sustaining and healthy, but the actual truth is that the body has plateaued and is beginning to decline.

The church in recapturing the original call will need to take some time to look back into its past. To look back is not to go and remain in the past but to rediscover those things that were important to their growth. One way of understanding this is through the concept of “Sankofa.” The word Sankofa comes from the Akan people of West Africa which means “it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot.”<sup>10</sup> Sankofa also means that one must go back to our roots to move forward. That is, one should reach back to the past and learn what it teaches us so that one can achieve the full potential in moving

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel H. Allen, “Taking a Closer Look at Church Renewal,” Church of God, accessed December 6, 2018, [http://www.churchofgod.org/pdf/SR\\_section3.pdf](http://www.churchofgod.org/pdf/SR_section3.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Allen, “Taking a Closer Look at Church Renewal,” accessed December 6, 2018, [http://www.churchofgod.org/pdf/SR\\_section3.pdf](http://www.churchofgod.org/pdf/SR_section3.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Gwendolyn Webb-Johnson, “Sankofa: Reclaiming Community,” *Black History Bulletin* 69, no. 1 (2006): 31-33.

forward. Whatever they have lost, forgotten, relinquished, or been stripped of can be regained, recovered, preserved, and extended.

Using the concept of Sankofa, Dr. Gwen Webb-Johnson highlights the view that school children can benefit from the progress of African American domestic and current service organizations. The organizations fulfill a compelling need in the field of education. Her goal is to teach Pre-kindergarten through twelve grade-learners the power of reclaiming the strengths and vitality of African American Service Groups.

The groups she refers to are Greek letter fraternities and sororities, NAACP, and 100 Black Men. The subjects to consider will be social studies and history. As the curriculum is developed teaches and learners will gain an understanding of historical and contemporary perspectives stressing the importance and effect of service to the African American community. Dr. Webb-Johnson states that “collective community efforts have always been and can continue to be a powerful tool for enrichment, support, development, and affirmation in the African American community.”<sup>11</sup>

Community service is important because so many school children are failing. Education should do a better job of teaching the connections between teachings in school and how to use those skills in the community. The reality is that teachers are unaware of the tradition and are unable to properly teach or construct “culturally responsive service-learning opportunities for the pre-K-12 learners.”<sup>12</sup> Using study standards would help to enlighten young people of their responsibility to serve the community. The Sankofa concept moves the instructor back to recover values that will renew the learning process.

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<sup>11</sup> Webb-Johnson, “Sankofa,” 31-33.

<sup>12</sup> Webb-Johnson, “Sankofa,” 31-33.



Dr. Webb-Johnson suggests that the theme of “Sankofa” be used to assist educating children. The concept of Sankofa can be used in understanding Asbury’s reason for looking back to find those perspectives that have been lost which may encourage the congregation to move forward. The primary goal of Dr. Web-Johnson is to prepare young people who are critical consumers and producers of knowledge and skills that will create and maintain a viable future for generations to come. If they are void in the understanding of their past, they will not know why community service is essential. If they believe that their present passion and interests in culture exclude them from serving the very community that ultimately supports them, then education would have done them a disservice. The model suggests that children can learn to help their community by becoming knowledgeable about their past. The model supports the idea that the church should do likewise.

Another perspective of renewal is called Strategic Renewal. Incorporations and business entities use this concept. To define “Strategic renewal,” it is important to first define “strategic” and then define “renewal.” There are several meanings of strategy, along with many concepts of what it means to be “strategic.” For purposes of analysis, “strategic” is “that which relates to the long-term projections of a company and has a critical influence on its accomplishment or failure.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, something is strategic renewal is that that relates to a firm’s predictions in a significant fashion. Some factors that are critical to a company’s long-term prospects may be relatively unimportant to its

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<sup>13</sup> This definition combines portions of definitions used by: S. G. Winter, “Knowledge and Competence as Strategic Assets,” in *The Competitive Challenge: Strategies for Industrial Innovation and Renewal*, ed. D. J. Teece (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing, 1987), 159–184; and R. P. Rumelt, D. E. Schendel, and D. J. Teece, *Fundamental Issues in Strategy: A Research Agenda* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1995), 9-47.

current well-being, and vice versa.<sup>14</sup> Also, because a group and its managers cannot foresee with certainty what factors will turn out to be critical for success in the future, elements that have the potential to affect an organization's long-term prospects substantially also are strategic.

In addition to defining the word "strategic," we must also define the use of the word "renewal." The verb "renew" as "to make like new." Synonyms include "to refresh" by restoring strength or animation or "to replace" that which is damaged, decayed, old, or worn out. Dictionaries also make clear that the verb "renew" is distinct from the verb "change." In its broadest definition, the verb "change" means "to make or become different." Change can include refreshment or replacement, but need not. For example, the transformation may refer to postponements, additions, or removals without any associated renewal. Therefore, renewal is one type of change.

Therefore, the definition of Strategic Renewal is the process, content, and outcome of refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization that has the potential to affect its long-term prospects substantially. Simply put, Strategic Renewal is a renewal process designed with strategies that will restore and enhance the future of an organization. Several companies use strategic renewal as a way of identifying areas of need to restore the firm to a viable and successful unit. IBM is an excellent example of how strategic renewal can be used to refresh and replace needed energy for its company.

IBM has been a significant corporation in the U.S. economy for several decades. The firm has been a leading source of office machines, CPUs, and statistics technology

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<sup>14</sup> Rajshree Agarwal and Constance E. Helfat, "Strategic Renewal of Organizations," *Organization Science* 20, no. 2 (March-April 2009): 281-293, accessed December 18, 2018, <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~rajshree/research/32%20Agarwal,%20Helfat%20-%202009>.

services. IBM's history is considered by numerous efforts at major strategic transformations along with continued incremental strategic renewal.

IBM first successfully transformed itself from an electromechanical accounting equipment company into an electronic computing company during the period 1940 to 1965.<sup>15</sup> In recent years, IBM has turned itself from a hardware-based computing company with a substantial personal computer business into a business computing Services Company.<sup>16</sup> In between these two successful transformations, IBM built a large PC business beginning in the early 1980s, as its mainframe computing business matured. Many observers consider IBM's move into PCs to have been poorly managed. As a result, other firms came to dominate the most profitable segments of the personal computer market, namely, Microsoft in operating systems and Intel in semiconductor chips, creating a "Wintel" platform.<sup>17</sup>

IBM undertook its first strategic transformation in response to a technological advance in electronic computing that occurred in the external environment as a result of university research, aided by U.S. military funding. In the face of this technological change, many of the leading electromechanical business machine companies failed. Of the companies that survived, IBM is generally acknowledged as having made the most

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<sup>15</sup> Steven W. Usselman, "IBM and its Imitators: Organizational Capabilities and the Emergence of the International Computer Industry," *Business and Economic History* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 1-35, accessed December 10, 2018, <http://w.thebhc.org/sites/default/files/beh/BEHprint/v022n2/p0001-p0035.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Steve Lohr, "The Media Business: Advertising; The New Leader of IBM Explains his Strategic Course," *New York Times*, October 31, 2002, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/31/business/media-business-advertising-new-leader-ibm-explains-his-strategic-course.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Jan W. Rivkin and Michael E. Porter, *Matching Dell* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School, 1999).

effective transition to electronic computing.<sup>18</sup> IBM's success resulted from strategies that responded to the many environmental opportunities and threats with adaptation and replacement of existing company attributes. For example, the company had early knowledge of, and access to, the technology of electronic computing through electronics research conducted for the U.S. government during World War II.<sup>19</sup>

Based in part on the IBM experience, researchers, Rajshree Agarwal and Constance E. Helfat developed five ideologies for strategic renewal. They believed that these principles "can be applied to other organizations aiming to renew themselves ahead of market disruption."<sup>20</sup> Those five principles are:

1. Select growth aspirations that connect with people emotionally.

Select growth aspirations that connect with people emotionally. Renewal needs to be tied to a growth aspiration that connects to the company's sense of identity — what motivates employees to come to work every day. For example, at Nissan Motor Co., when the company's future was on the line, CEO Carlos Ghosn established the goal to "renew Nissan." This provided a rallying cry that encouraged dispirited employees to get behind the turnaround effort. Without a crisis, emotional energy needs to come from somewhere else. A goal that anticipates success and speaks to the core identity of employees can be more compelling than fear of loss. For example, compare how Ciba Vision, a global contact lens manufacturer, framed its program for strategic renewal in the eye-care solutions business around "healthy eyes for life" with how one British manufacturer defined its goals around 5/10/2010: 5% revenue growth and 10% profit growth by 2010. While that mantra had a catchy ring, the only person it inspired was the CEO. Not only did the company miss its numbers, but it also

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<sup>18</sup> Heinz Wehrich, "The TOWS Matrix—A Tool for Situational Analysis," *Long Range Planning* 15, no. 2 (1982): 54-66.

<sup>19</sup> Agarwal and Helfat, "Strategic Renewal," accessed December 18, 2018, <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~rajshree/research/32%20Agarwal,%20Helfat%20-%202009>.

<sup>20</sup> Agarwal and Helfat, "Strategic Renewal," accessed December 18, 2018, <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~rajshree/research/32%20Agarwal,%20Helfat%20-%202009>.

suffered a major contract loss, after that the stock plunged, in part because of the relentless focus on short-term results.<sup>21</sup>

2. Treat strategy as a dialogue as opposed to a ritualistic, document-based planning process.

Turning an aspiration into reality requires going beyond highly formatted planning processes and having tough, fact-based conversations. In this spirit, some companies are looking beyond PowerPoint presentations to find new ways of engaging managers in their strategy process. A European-based publishing company we worked with, for example, created a set of posters that displayed market data, competitor analysis and benchmarking information as a way to spark a dialogue. During a strategy meeting, the senior team was invited to discuss the data during a "gallery walk." At Nedbank Group, a bank holding company in South Africa, CEO Ingrid Johnson, who had been frustrated by the pace of change as she sought to capture mid-market customers, discovered that one way to gain traction for an ambitious transformation following a major management overhaul was to conduct what she called "pause and reflect" sessions. These sessions provided a safe space for the leaders to explore her expectations for them and start to make connections to their daily priorities.<sup>22</sup>

3. Use experiments to explore future possibilities.

Strategic dialogues can help organizations grow new businesses through experimentation. Experimentation practices — adapted in many cases from the venture-capital world — create opportunities for established businesses to explore the future. For example, the Cisneros Group, a Spanish-language media company with operations across the United States and Latin America, decided in 2010 to expand its presence in digital media. However, since it wasn't clear what the best business model would be, management initiated several pilots. The goal was to identify a viable value proposition, then invest in the ventures that showed promise. One of the new businesses was Adsmovil, a service that helps companies target Hispanic audiences on their mobile devices. The service was so effective that it was retained by the Obama campaign in 2012 to target Hispanic voters.<sup>23</sup>

4. Engage a leadership community in the work of renewal.

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<sup>21</sup> Andy Binns et al., "The Art of Strategic Renewal," in *MIT Sloan Management Review*, December 19, 2013, accessed January 10, 2019, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-art-of-strategic-renewal/>.

<sup>22</sup> Binns et al., "Art of Strategic Renewal," accessed January 10, 2019, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-art-of-strategic-renewal/>.

<sup>23</sup> Binns et al., "Art of Strategic Renewal," accessed January 10, 2019, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-art-of-strategic-renewal/>.

Strategic renewal must be rooted in the senior team's collective commitment to a transformation agenda. However, successful strategic renewals also need to be broadly based so they can engage managers one or two levels down in the organization. Creating leadership communities around the renewal project allows leaders to learn about the future by doing and win over potential resisters. IBM, for example, found that earmarking resources for experimentation, while continuing to hold operating units to tight cost disciplines, led to resentment, even resistance. Instead, the company's "Strategic Leadership Forums" brought together groups of up to 100 executives to work on how to make new ventures successful. Rather than forcing people to help in the new ventures, the forums helped to build a social network of leaders who would decide to advocate for the new projects on their own. At Cisneros, managers were wary of entering technology businesses, which were very different from the core of broadcasting. So the company assembled teams from across the organization to explore ideas for new ventures. Each team focused on a different idea and was asked to follow a specific evaluation process. "We needed these teams to go beyond managing the day-to-day and reconceive of the future of the firm by actually showing us what we needed to do," says the CEO, Adriana Cisneros.<sup>24</sup>

##### 5. Apply execution disciplines to the effort.

Management needs to bring as much focused execution to strategic renewals as it brings to other projects that are vital to business performance. Here we disagree with other experts who have argued that this effort can be assigned to enthusiastic volunteers, who pursue it in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities. Although the idea of volunteer efforts is certainly appealing (if for no other reason than its cost), our research and experience suggest that a company's strategic renewal shouldn't have to compete with the pressures of the day-to-day. Rather, it requires a full-fledged commitment and the necessary funding and resources. The experience of Cisco speaks directly to this concern. Realizing the imperative to create new revenue streams as its router business matured, Cisco launched a new initiative in 2007 that was designed to get multiple levels of executives involved in identifying and investing in new business opportunities. But the approach, which was dubbed "boards and councils," was weak on accountability, and the effort was later dismantled. Strategic renewal can't be viewed as a night job; it is core to the work of leaders, who must be able to keep the tension between short- and long-term priorities in balance. Strategic renewal takes guile. After all, the corporate immune response is compelling: Leaders find it much easier to resist change than to embrace it. Strategic renewal acknowledges this: It is about "both,

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<sup>24</sup> Binns et al., "Art of Strategic Renewal," accessed January 10, 2019, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-art-of-strategic-renewal/>.

and" rather than "either, or." The practices we propose can enable senior leaders to build a bridge to the future without burning the bridges from the past.<sup>25</sup>

Number one implies that the goals of the company should concern itself with the desires of the person connected to it. People are the essential source of income and not only are the needs of persons to be considered but the way they feel concerning the company.

Number two is an effort to draw away from an actual conversation that sticks to theoretical concepts to allow for spontaneity and freedom to change when necessary.

Three encourages companies to experiment with different ways of drawing the attention of those who might not have an interest in the firm. An experiment opens of possibilities that expand revenues. The fourth principle opens the door to lead persons to invest their efforts and collect the views and concerns of those who are responsible for the future growth of the organization. Teamwork to move the group forward is critical to this step. Taken ownership has always served to aid in collaboration. The fifth principle implies that any effort of strategic renewal must be sufficiently funded, and resource provided.

The IBM strategic renewal model indicated that leaders find it less stressful to fight change than to embrace it. Strategic renewal admits that in order of change to occur it must begin with those responsible for the organization. This view very much holds for the church or those who claim membership. IBM removed itself from its comfort zone to a place vulnerability. By opening itself to change it grew and created a system that encouraged other companies. When a strategic renewal embarks an organization will realize the greater possibilities that go beyond it.

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<sup>25</sup> Binns et al., "Art of Strategic Renewal," accessed January 10, 2019, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-art-of-strategic-renewal/>.

William J. Abraham in his book, *The Logic of Renewal*, states that “Thus at present, the obvious danger for mainline Christians is that they will engage in so many rounds of reform that there will be nothing left to reform. The tradition becomes so thinned out that it collapses from within in the ebb and flow of cultural change.”<sup>26</sup> Abraham suggests that the church has spent so much time trying to adjust to a culture that it has lost the purpose for which it exists. He continues “The tradition becomes so thinned out that it collapses from within in the ebb and flow of cultural change.”<sup>27</sup> In his book, which is a survey of several renewal movements, Abraham makes the assumption:

As the Holy Spirit blows afresh like the wind, and as we receive, we can be sure that we will always get more than we anticipated. We will be in error, therefore, if we try and freeze the work of the Spirit into the channels and forms with which that work was initially associated. It is better to relax and be open to the fullness, ingenuity, and complexity of the life of the Holy Spirit in the church. We must have for our treasure what is old and what is new.<sup>28</sup>

What is old and what is new is where the author feels we need to focus on the church.

The church must consider its original call to be the church of Christ. According to John 16:13-15, the Holy Spirit leads us into what that call should be:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he would take what is mine and declare it to you.

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<sup>26</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 1705.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham, *Logic of Renewal*, 1701.

<sup>28</sup> Abraham, *Logic of Renewal*, 1810.



An overarching theme of renewal is that it must be born and begin in the heart of the believer. God is the initiator and believers receive it into the heart. Revival is the work of God through grace and mercy. The church will work to accept the blessing of God. The author believes that the church is in decline because of a shift from the original call to ministry, meaning that when the church came into existence, there was a specific call or urgency that brought it together. Over time throughout the history of the church, it grew and developed. There were times when the congregation flourished and carried out its mission, and there were times when it did not. Much of the change that affected the church was cultural. A strategic church renewal plan will help to restore the church to its covenanted mission to serve God and the world. Asbury's call back to ministry is a call to aid the local school system in education. The churches strong and rich background in education has slowly drifted to an internal routine of non-affect. The body seeks to secure the needs of the members with an occasional gist of outreach. The author suggests that Asbury take some time to revisit the early ministry of the church to rekindle the flame of missional ministry.

### *Renewal Model*

Before the church can embark upon a model for ministry, it must return to three positive qualities that help others to see and respect the church. The first is integrity. Integrity means that we are walking the walk and not just talking the talk. The body of Christ is the embodiment of the savior. The church has to commit to practicing what it believes. The second is passion. Passion implies that one is willing to immerse themselves entirely into that work without hesitation. Wholeness is the coming together

of the mind, body, and spirit. The unity of the body exemplifies the ultimate purpose of God for humanity.

### *Plan of Action*

1. Congregation and Community Prayer: There will be time devoted to praying for the church and community. Small prayer bands will help to facilitate this phase.
2. Study of the Scriptures: There will be in church and out of church Bible studies. All of the studies will focus on renewal and Sankofa type principles.
3. Pastor involvement and leadership. The pastor must be entirely convinced and dedicated to the plan. It will be helpful for the pastor to spend some time in preparation to give proper guidance to the congregation.
4. Congregation involvement and leadership. There will be a series of training for members and those who volunteer to serve as leaders. These members will make covenants which will include the pastor to participate in various aspects of the plan.
5. Connecting with the Community. The church must re-connect to the community to acquire feedback that will inform the plan of ways in which to be innovated.

The efforts of this renewal plan are to bring back a church that is vital and serving with the power of God to a hurting world.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

#### *The Call*

The Asbury United Methodist Church was called in 1866 by God to establish a body of Christ in the city of Holly Springs, Mississippi. The task was not only to organize a church but to develop a school to educate former slaves. Not all agree that the call was prevalent to the twenty-seven charter members who came forth and committed themselves to the building of the congregation. However, it is evident from the early history of the church that their zeal and success was Divine. Within a year of its organization, the church grew to 168 members and created one of the first schools for freed slaves in the Marshall County Mississippi area. The small school would result in the formation of Rust College, which to this day exist with a student body of over one thousand students.

The congregation, like so many others, has turned to the place of complacency. Just like the churches of England of which John Wesley served, Asbury needs reminding of the call of Christ on the Church. Asbury perhaps can find renewal as it searches for ways to reconnect with the community of Holly Springs. The practices of the early classes reveal progress when members seek the calling of Christ. These practices are worth rediscovering in any congregation which has lost its way in a culture that has and is rapidly changing. A recommitment to the call of the church can rediscover a foundation

that fostered many ministries and missions that help the congregation to flourish. Our goal is to identify methods that will help the congregation to regain a fruitful ministry and reestablish a direction for future growth.

Asbury will not understand its past until the church reconsiders the call of God upon it. The founding of a college and working for years to develop and support it has been outstanding. With the resources available to it, the church can renew and push forward. The public school of Holly Springs is today needing support and help to fulfill its mission as well.

Reflection on the biblical texts reveals that the people of Israel had come home from captivity and forgotten that the work of God was just as crucial as the rebuilding of their own lives. The prophet, Isaiah, called them to rebuild the house of God to renew the right covenant with God. The people were also encouraged to do those things that pleased God and not themselves. To return and build up the temple of God would require sacrifice. Sacrifice is giving up the desire of men and seeking to do the will of God. Sacrifice requires the entire person to submit to the will of God. Worship and fasting without the will of God at the center do not please God.

To give self to God is what Wesley refers to as a renewal of the heart. One must see the work of God as the primary purpose in their relationship with God. The following are ways in which we will seek to deploy a concept of renewal within Asbury and Holly Springs. Re-commitment to the call of God, Asbury was called to be the body of Christ as well as to provide guidance and leadership to those who needed education. Rediscovering this call will help to enhance the future of the congregation. Re-discover past values such as opening the church to all persons, providing help to those who are not

similar to us, loving all persons with unconditional love are the values that are lacking today. The image of the church can change when the body expresses new values. Re-focus on community needs is education. It was that way in 1866, and it exists in 2019. Asbury still has the potential and resources to provide support to the school system of the city. Return to evangelism because churches in decline often forget the call of Jesus to His disciples. Mark 16:15, Jesus asked the disciples to go into the world, to preach “Good News.” The church is to spread the word to all people. A purposeful congregation will teach and preach the word of God. Teaching and preaching are the foundations of the Great Commission.

The theme of Sankofa is the overarching concept of the entire project. Sankofa helps to give confidence that it is okay to review the past to renew and refresh the future. It is while returning to our history that we will discover ways to enhance what we do today to push forward. Sankofa, which means to return and get it, draws the church to the reality that there is something of its past that is missing. We must return and claim our history to move toward our future. It is in understanding who we were that will free us to embrace who we now are. It is essential to Asbury and churches like it to remember those things that helped to propel the congregation forward into its present reality. Education was forced upon the people as a necessary tool to help the members of the church and the community to survive.

The Book of Jeremiah says in chapter 29:7, “Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare.” The prayers of God’s people can enhance the success of a city. God expects for the church to involve itself in the life and welfare of the community. Asbury has,

from the start of its ministry, worked closely with the city of Holly Springs. Just as streets and municipalities go together, churches and societies are connected. The people of God are linked to its local city and the world. The project encouraged Asbury not only to reconnect with the town through the Public School System but in a way that will renew the vitality of the congregation. The return to the education theme will allow the church to utilize the many tools and gifts it already has to enhance awareness of the congregation's presence within the community. The hope is to redevelop partnerships that will assist the church in growth and positive witness to its mission.

Renewal means reestablishing the church to the purposes and provisions of God who created it. Jesus founded the church according to the plan of God. Restoring the body of Christ is not something that people do on their own, but what God does through those who allow God to do so. The power of the Holy Spirit is the central element in the renewal of the Church. When people of God surrender and are willing and ready to be used by God, then the church is pleasing God and living out the mission of the faith.

Our goal is to identify methods that will help the congregation to regain a fruitful ministry and reestablish a direction for future growth. To renew Asbury will require a strategic plan that will set the course of its future. Businesses and corporations all have to develop strategies to maximize their profits and secure their future. A reliable and robust commitment to a method of action is needed by the entire congregation to ensure that the church is fruitful. Asbury's strategic plan will include at least six points of focus to enhance its future.

## **Methodology**

The qualitative process was used to complete the research of the project. The following methods helped to precipitate the task.

1. Congregation Survey. (Presented on April 7, 2019)
2. Four Study Sessions for Asbury's congregation and church leadership (Implemented April 2019)
3. Teacher and School Administrator Survey
4. African American Pastors Survey
5. Interviews with community and public officials

The congregation survey was developed to help the church to ask questions of it before asking others. Understanding that many churches are in decline and are seeking renewal

Asbury first returned to a dialogue of its original purpose and call to ministry.

The call to ministry reminded the church of the urgency for which God first called. That initial call was the need for a place of worship for those who were set free and the need to educate those individuals to the ways of society. The dialogue helped the congregation to understand the rich history of a people who had practically no resources but believed in themselves and the God who had freed them.

Secondly, Asbury refreshed itself with understanding the root system of the denomination. The root of the Methodist faith was the early class system. The early classes taught the church about covenants. The church needed to understand that worship was not enough to live out the faith, but instead, to serve neighbor expressed a right relationship with God. Third, Asbury sought to reconnect with its full vitality. By reevaluating the potential of the membership and becoming acquainted with resources available to it from the United Methodist Church, the congregation was encouraged to

reach out into new and active ministry. Fourth, the church sought ways of adjusting to various changes which have occurred within its community. The body of Christ cannot ignore the differences in culture and mission environments. Therefore, the church needs strategies to help identify when it is time to shift attitude and resources. Fifth, Asbury will require methods that will include all persons in the life of the church and leadership. The community is made up of persons of different races, ages, and backgrounds. A ministry that seeks to involve not just one group, but those that are diverse and inter-culturally mixed will do well to serve as a modern church. Lastly, Asbury will need to engage in future planning that will continue to enhance the mission of their past. The church by working closely with the city, schools, community leader, and other churches are working to create a continuity of growth and expectation. Three surveys were developed and presented to Asbury UMC Membership, Public School Officials, and African American pastors of the Mississippi Annual Conference.

The Asbury survey was a paper produce document and offered to the congregation and members of the leadership council on April 7, 2019. The survey was given as the first step in the research process. In order to gain feedback from sources outside the church, a survey was present to teachers and administrators of the Holly Springs School District. The instrument was developed to allow for the input of those who could be helpful in ministry design and implementation of future community efforts. Of the fifty surveys delivered, only twenty-two were returned. The document is as follows: Teacher Survey, Teacher and School Leaders Survey, Community Service leaders:

1. Are you familiar with Asbury United Methodist Church?



Very \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat \_\_\_\_\_

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_

2. To what extent do you feel that religious groups should be involved in supporting education?

Very involved \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat involved \_\_\_\_\_

No involvement \_\_\_\_\_

3. List one way in which the church and or religious groups can support the schools of Holly Springs?

4. What are the barriers to school and church partnerships?

5. Should the church and religious groups stay out of education issues?

6. How long have you been a teacher or school staff? How long have you served this community?

7. What grade or subject to you teach? What is your specific responsibility to the community?

8. Do you attend church?

9. What is your age range: 21-31, 32-42, 43-53, 54 and above

10. What do you like most about the church?

Preaching \_\_\_\_\_

Teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Ministries \_\_\_\_\_

Fellowship \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. Are you a member of a local congregation, if so what church and denomination?

12. Are you actively involved in the life of your church, if so name areas of involvement?
13. Is your church growing, plateaued, or in decline?
14. Does your church know its history? How old is your church?
15. How involved is your church in the community?

The third survey was presented to pastors of Black United Methodist churches. The survey served as an instrument of comparison. The compared ministry was needed in order to understand how other African American churches are doing in their ministry and community. The information gained from this survey would help Asbury to identify factors that may guide the congregation in the direction of growth. The survey also gives information about the state of the African American church in similar communities. Many of the cities in Mississippi where these churches reside are majority black population. These areas are experiencing similar education issues, economic problems, and rising crime.

The last step of the research involved the conducting of several interviews. The interviews were conducted in five days and were all done face to face. Four meetings were included in the research of the eight persons selected. The interviews included four community leaders. The persons selected were chosen for their specific office in the community, which included the Mayor, a State Representative, a Rust College Administrator, and Superintendent of Public Schools. The interviews were strictly confidential. The conversations will be not shared with anyone nor will the names of the participants be known by anyone other than myself. The recordings of these interviews were compiled with other such interviews and sealed in a password-protected data file for the sole purpose of my use. By a written consent form, all participants granted

permission to use any part of the taped conversations verbatim to inform the results of this research.

The purpose of the interview is to ascertain the opinions of civic and community leaders on the subject of the involvement of the church within the community. The sessions lasted thirty to forty minutes and conducted in private. The interviews took place on April 15-18, 2019.

After the survey and interviews were completed and analyzed a special meeting was called of the Leadership Council of Asbury UMC, including the peer associates, which took place on March 31, 2019. The meeting was called to discuss the outcome of the congregational survey. At this called council meeting, I invited this group to serve as the host for the project and to participate in the final stages of development. All members of the committee agreed and promised to give as much feedback as possible.

The officers of the council are: Leadership Council Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Finance Chair, Staff Parish Pastor Relations Chair, Lay Leader, Trustee Chair, Outreach Chair, Nature Chair, Witness Chair, Pastor and Pastor Assistants, and five Peer Associates. It was essential to the leadership that the survey had revealed that many members of the church needed help and knowledge in the following areas.

## **Implementation**

### *Renewal Study Sessions*

1. Principles of committed membership.
2. Knowledge of the original call of Asbury Church and its role in the achievements of the Methodist Episcopal Church.
3. A walk through the history of the church understanding the past while linking the present to

the future with the hope of developing a comprehensive plan. 4. The move to create a school and college and why the education agenda is still essential today.

### *Committed Membership*

This session allowed the congregation to review the principles of membership. The leadership first indicated the need to understand the basic concepts which guide the group in its ministry and call. The call to ministry is related to the Great Commission as set forth by Jesus Christ. Therefore, this session was a time of reflecting using a study from a short study entitled *The Great Commission*, which outlined personal instruction, its significance for Christians and personal callings.<sup>1</sup>

### *Personal Instruction*

The Great Commission is one of the most significant passages in the Holy Bible. First, it is the last recorded personal instruction given by Jesus to His disciples. Second, it is a special calling from Jesus Christ to all His followers to take specific action while on this earth. The Great Commission is found in the Gospel of Matthew, “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matt. 28:18-20).

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Laurie, “The Great Commission,” AllAboutJesusChrist.org, May 22, 2019, accessed July 25, 2019, <https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/the-great-commission.htm>.

### *Its Significance for Christians*

The Great Commission is the end of a Gospel and the beginning of faith in action for all Christians. This command from Jesus is significant because it's a personal instruction for Christians to have a profound faith in Jesus Christ, as indicated in verse 18. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This is an incredibly powerful statement which demands faith in Jesus Christ, validating His power in the lives of Christians and their commitment to Him. This verse acts as a clear claim to Christ's omnipotence, and therefore, His deity. If Christians do not believe this statement, complete faith does not exist. Jesus is very clear about His authority in the world -- it is complete and total from the beginning of time itself (John 1:1-3). In verse 19, Jesus gives His believers specific directions to follow after they have affirmed their faith. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Jesus calls all His followers to act and share the Good News of salvation throughout the world. People hear this calling and travel each year on missionary trips throughout the earth, spreading the word of Jesus Christ. Many Christians have made incredible sacrifices, traveling to remote regions of the world beyond the civilized cities into jungles and deserts. Mission fields can also be very close to home. It could be a neighbor who has not heard the Good News or a poverty-stricken area just down the road where people can't afford Bibles. In the 21st century, the Internet has become a mission field where people can reach out and share Christ's love. The places and people who need to hear the Gospel are everywhere! Another important aspect of verse 19 is that Christ is explicitly teaching the doctrine of the Trinity to His followers. The three Persons of the Godhead are each equally and fully God and here presented in the logical order of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - yet only One God from the beginning (see Romans 1:20). Finally, in verse 20, Jesus provides specific direction with an affirmation to His followers, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Christians are instructed to teach others about Jesus Christ and the entirety of His truth. We can't profess Christ as Savior and Lord while rejecting certain of His teachings. As we teach Christ's truths, verse 20 declares that we can be confident, in faith, that Jesus Christ will support us.<sup>2</sup>

### *A Personal Calling*

Jesus calls every Church to move out on faith and share the news of Christ. This is faith in action! People who obey this command change their spiritual lives forever! It could be spreading the Good News to a neighbor or moving to another country to reach the people there. It could be sharing with less fortunate kids down the street or spreading the Word in a town two hours away. Wherever we

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<sup>2</sup> Laurie, "The Great Commission," accessed July 25, 2019, <https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/the-great-commission.htm>.

go, every faithful Christian is compelled through obedience to share the Gospel. A question for the believer is where He has called you to go? Who has God put on your heart to share the gift of salvation? What small or large steps can you take, with the knowledge that Christ will be by your side, "to make disciples of all the nations?"<sup>3</sup>

*The Call of Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church (1866)*

Study session two was a time of understanding the history of Asbury from its existence to the present. The outline was as follows:

- I. Who were the people that organized the church and why?
- II. The purpose and goal of the Methodist Episcopal church
- III. The move to develop a school of learning which eventually lead to a college
- IV. Is the Education agenda important today?

In his classic book *Slave Religion*, Albert J. Raboteau depicts the circumstance facing former slaves:

As contraband slave Brother Thornton warned the refugees at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, Canaan Land was still off in the distance: We have been in the furnace of affliction, and are still, but God only means to separate the dross and get us so that like the pure metal we may reflect the image of our Purifier, who is sitting by to watch the process. I am assured that what God begins, he will bring to an end. We need faith, patience, and perseverance to realize the desired result. There must be no looking back to Egypt. Israel passed forty years in the wilderness because of their unbelief. What if we cannot see right off the green fields of Canaan, Moses could not. He could not even see how to cross the Red Sea. If we would have greater freedom of body, we must free ourselves from the shackles of sin, and especially the sin of unbelief. We must snap the chain of Satan and educate ourselves and our children.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Laurie, "The Great Commission," accessed July 25, 2019, <https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/the-great-commission.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 320-322.

What we are hearing from Brother Thornton is the dilemma of thousands of former newly freed slaves. Those were the people who formed and developed Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866. It was a time to rejoice and make big decisions about the future of their own lives and the community in which they lived. In session two, Asbury took a long hard look at its history.

The group used the Raboteau book to understand the nature of slave religions and the impact of American slavery. Raboteau clearly stated the conditions of those persons who were now emancipated. The instituting members of the church came with an understanding of God and a knowledge of worship. Therefore, it would not have been difficult to draw persons to join the congregation.

In an unpublished book about Asbury called “Our Templed Hills” by J. H. Graham, gives a detailed chronology of the development of the church, starting with the appointment of Reverend Moses Adams in 1865.<sup>5</sup> It is understood that the members joined because of the Methodist Episcopal Church committed to the freeing of the slaves. The church began out of a necessity to provide a place of worship for those set free. This says much for the church to develop a place for those who know Christ for spiritual worship and teaching of the word. The church is a haven for the people of God for fellowship and the receiving of love. It was appropriate for these free persons to begin their life anew together in the house of God.

Once the congregation was established and chartered, it was time for them to elect officers and set a course for a new ministry. In an organizational meeting to select Leaders, no one excepted the secretary position. It was then discovered that no could

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<sup>5</sup> H. J. Graham, *Our Templed Hills* (Holly Springs, MI: unpublished, 1991), 6.

read well enough to serve in that position. At this point, it was the pastor who then begins the process of establishing a school for freed slaves. This school eventually became Shaw University and later changed to Rust College. The sessions were guided mostly by conversations and historical records from the college and the church and Reverend Grahams work (Our Temple Hills) on the life and history of the church. This was a three-hour session.

### *A Return to the Call, Education*

Session four was a three-hour session on April 22, 2019 information was discussed on the public schools and educational data from the department of education in Mississippi. This session informed the church of the realities of the Holly Springs Schools and pointed out many of the factors which prevented the schools from performing at a satisfactory level. A representative from the superintendent's office was invited to come and share in this session. The information presented can be found below. Holly Springs Public School has tremendous needs. Examination of the data indicates that in all proficiencies Holly Springs public schools scored only 24 %, while the state of Mississippi was 43.2%. Of all, the students in the school district who were college and career ready only 27% were prepared compared to the state's 38.1%. The overall grade for the district was a "D." Ironically, despite the low proficiency, 87.9% graduated from high school. The score does not indicate which direction the persons went, whether to college or the workforce.

After the session, the group discussed possible ministries of which the church could aid in the improvement of the public schools of Holly Springs. Ideas included after



school tutoring, male mentoring, adopt a school, parent awareness events, several thoughts on teaching support programs. In session four, the attendees were much more informed as to the state of the schools. The entire congregation was invited to attend the session; however, only twenty-two persons were present.

*African American Pastors and Black Churches of Mississippi*

Step four was an important process in the development of this project. Data from African American United Methodist Pastors about the state of their churches was essential for identifying those churches that are similar to Asbury. The questions of the survey are as follows:

1. How long have you served this congregation?  
☐ 1-5 years  
☐ 6 or more years
2. Is the congregation a full-time charge?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
3. How involved is the congregation within the community?  
☐ A great deal  
☐ A moderate amount  
☐ A little  
☐ None at all
4. When was the church organized?  
☐ 1800's

\_\_\_\_\_ 1900's

5. What race or ethnicity were the first congregants?

\_\_\_\_\_ White or Caucasian

\_\_\_\_\_ Black/African American

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

6. Which race/ethnicity best describes your present church? (Please choose only one)

\_\_\_\_\_ American Indian or Alaskan Native

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian/Pacific Islander

\_\_\_\_\_ Black or African American

\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic

\_\_\_\_\_ White/Caucasian

\_\_\_\_\_ Multiple ethnicities/Other (please specify)

7. What was the first major ministry of the church?

8. What are the significant accomplishments of the church over the past years of its existence?

9. What are some significant challenges of the congregation?

10. What was the original number of persons who organized the church?

\_\_\_\_\_ 1-40

\_\_\_\_\_ 50-70

\_\_\_\_\_ Above 80

11. What is the present state of the congregation?

\_\_\_\_\_ Growing

\_\_\_\_\_ Plateaued

\_\_\_\_ Declining

12. What are present ministries in place that's similar to those of the early church?

13. What is the size of the present congregation?

\_\_\_\_ 1-40

\_\_\_\_ 50-80

\_\_\_\_ 90-120

The survey was sent to thirty pastors, and twelve responded. See survey monkey full analysis in exhibits. The responses most related to the interest of the project question two, three, four, seven, nine and ten. The responses to the questions are indicated below.

Is the congregation a full-time charge? Twenty-eight-point thirty-three percent responded no and 41.6% responded no.

How involved is the congregation within the community? The responses were a great deal (33.3%), a lot (16.7%), a moderate amount (33.3%), a little (16.7%), and none at all (0.00%).

When was the church organized? The churches were organized in the 1800's and 1900's. The majority were organized in the 1800's at 58.33% and 41.67% were organized in the 1900's.

What was the first major ministry of the church? The responses varied for this question. The range of responses were: a place to worship, do not know, evangelizing, outreach to the needy and food pantry, mission, worship, education, Sunday school, outreach to form a church choir, music and community education.

What are some significant challenges of the congregation? Again, the responses varied. The responses ranged from leadership, declining neighborhoods, finance,

declining membership, positive leadership, meeting annual budgets, involving more congregants in leadership roles, more small groups started to pay off church debt on building that will free up money for more mission projects, Christian education, growth, money, loss of membership, filling leadership roles, going out with the community to evangelize, funding for ministry ideas and facility updates, and membership.

What was the original number of persons who organized the church?

The responses varied and have been categorized according to percentages and numbers. For churches from one to forty fell in the category of 91.67%. For churches from fifty to seventy fell in the category of 8.33%. There were no churches that had more than eighty persons.

#### *Teacher and School Administrator Survey*

The teacher survey yielded data profitable to the project. It was essential to gather feedback from the educators and administrators in order to get a feel for how much the church or should be involved in helping the school. The questions and responses reviewed are as follows.

Table 2. Survey results – teacher familiarity with Asbury United Methodist Church  
Are you familiar with Asbury United Methodist Church?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very	37.50%	6
Somewhat	6.25%	1
Not at all	56.25%	9
	Answered	16
	Skipped	0

List ways in which the church can support the schools of Holly Springs. Fourteen persons responded to the question and two people skipped the question. The responses were as follows: I don't know, after school tutoring, book donations, provide tutoring,

fun activities for the children, volunteer, fundraisers, volunteer to read, teach calming techniques, read with children, fund different events, after school tutoring, hygiene education, providing supplies for classrooms, offering to counsel to willing students, mentorship programs, provide supplies through community drives, support for after school activities, mentorship and help provide uniforms, mentoring students and support teachers.

Table 3. Survey results – barriers to school and church partnerships  
What are the barriers to school and church partnerships?

Answered	14
Skipped	2

The responses varied, which included: I do not know, transportation, school materials, religious beliefs and culture, most people do not go, too many different religions in a school, teach them how to believe in themselves, speak the word but do not force it on someone, invoking church doctrine, differences in religion among students and their family, unknown, there are no barriers, in my opinion, churches should be there for those students/families that would like the support, however, should not be forced on all students and families with different beliefs.

Table 4. Survey results – church involvement in education issues  
Should the church stay out of education issues?

Answer	Choices	Responses
Yes	37.50%	6
No	62.50%	10
	Answered	16
	Skipped	0

Table 5. Survey results – local church attendance  
Do you attend a local church?

Answer	Choices	Responses
Yes	56.25%	9
No	43.75%	7
	Answered	16
	Skipped	0

Table 6. Survey results – favorite aspects of the church  
What do you like most about the church?

Answer	Choices	Responses
Preaching	21.43%	3
Teaching	35.71%	5
Ministries	14.29%	2
Fellowship	21.43%	3
Other	7.14%	1
	Answered	14
	Skipped	2

Table 7. Survey results – involvement in life of church  
Are you actively involved in the life of your church? If so name areas of involvement?

Answered	15
Skipped	1

The responses were varied and were as follows: n/a, all, yes...usher and education, no, preaching and teaching, worship, choir and youth department, child ministry, choir, children's ministry, hospitality ministry, and prefer not to say.

Table 8. Survey results – present state of congregation  
Which of the following describes the present state of your congregation?

Answer	Choices	Responses
Growing	66.67%	8
Plateaued	25.00%	3
in decline	8.33%	1
	Answered	12
	Skipped	4

Table 9. Survey results – knowledge of church history  
Does your congregation know the history of the church?

Answer	Choices	Responses
Yes	100.00%	12
No	0.00%	0
	Answered	12
	Skipped	4

Table 10. Survey results – church involvement in community  
How involved is your church in the community?

Answer	Choices	Responses
A great deal	53.85%	7
A lot	7.69%	1

A moderate amount	7.69%	1
A little	23.08%	3
None at all	7.69%	1
	Answered	13
	Skipped	3

With the corporation of the Principles of Holly Springs Schools, teachers and administrators were invited to go to the web site to fill out the survey. All were asked to give feedback, and only sixteen responded. The study was designed to ensure complete confidentiality. We hoped for more to show interest; however, we are grateful for those who participated.

The final step of implementation was to conduct a series of interviews. Four persons were interviewed, and only three will be shared in this project. These meetings were done in order to gain insight and input from those in positions of authority in the city of Holly Springs. All of the three persons selected are civic employees, and all have several years of service to the town.

Those whose input will be shared are Mr. Kevin Buck, Mayor of Holly Springs, Dr. Irene Turnage, Superintendent of Holly Springs School District, and Dr. Charles Williams, Director of Grants and Federal Affairs at Rust College. The interviews will be paraphrased; however, the full transcript can be found in the addendum.

Questions and responses are as follows:

Question 1. Are you familiar with Asbury UMC, and if so, what do you know of its history and ministries?

Dr. Turnage stated:

I am familiar with Asbury. Asbury has been a church that has been here for several years, and it is a long-standing traditional church. I have been there many times, either for some of the services or from time to time people have asked me to come and give an update on things that we have going on in the school system. I know a lot of people who attend the church who have been longtime friends and

people I have worked with. So yes, I love it when the church is helping us extend our educational opportunity. I am excited about that.

Dr. Williams stated:

When I was a student here, Asbury was very pivotal for all the students who came to Rust College. The ministers came and participated in activities from the church. They would always encourage us to go there. The pastors also came here participating in certain activities. Asbury is vital to college because of its legacy, and it is the places whereby many of our students have joined the United Methodist Church.

Mayor Buck stated:

I moved here from Tupelo in 1989 and my first church experience after moving here was Asbury United Methodist Church. I have been there ever since, and I have some good reasons for making that choice. I knew absolutely nothing of Asbury and very little about the United Methodist Church, quite frankly, prior to coming to Holly Springs. In my pursuit of a church home for my family and me, the thing that I was looking for most was a church that ministered to the total man. I wanted a church that was open more than just on Sundays. Of course, I can remember early on in my Baptist Affiliated church, we only had service on the third Sunday of the month. I think it is like first and third Sunday. Well, I certainly did not want to do that. I wanted a church that was at least open every Sunday, and I wanted to be involved with a church that had ministries that went far beyond just preaching on Sunday. In my experience here in Holly Springs, I soon found what I was looking for. The church that I was looking for, my wife was looking for, was a church that like Asbury totally involved in the community was not afraid to get into the political and civic roles that were necessary for church members, due to be involved within the community. In Holly Springs certainly, there were many Asbury people who were members. They were all over the community contributing in various ways to the community whether in education, which was primarily the role that many of the members had, whether K-12 or the college itself or even in Christian education. With that said, and with that the many outreach ministries that they had; it was ideal. I got involved with Asbury for that reason. I joined Asbury and got engaged in various different auxiliaries of the church. I never sought to be in any kind of leadership role in the church. I mean I had enough responsibility to some other areas.

Question 2: What is your opinion of the church and its involvement in the community and public school activities?

Dr. Turnage stated:

I love the relationship between the churches and schools. People always say keep church and school separate, but I've always liked to share with them that it is a good relationship that can exist between the public schools and our churches.



And so, for me, it has been a relationship that has been positive. In past years, we would have different activities. It may be something as simple as a school drive or school supply drive. We've had a pastor alliance which is not functioning like it used to, but our pastors would come to the school and talk to our children and check on our children. We were always very clear that they could not talk about any specific denomination.

Dr. Williams stated:

Sure, I feel that it is paramount for the church because the church is the community just like the school district is community and families. You have to be engaged in activities in the community because that's our identity. And so, clothes closet, shelters, food kitchens, whatever the need might arise we should respond to it. Now that doesn't mean that we respond to it continuously, but whatever brought it to our attention, and we address that we may be able to move on to something else. So, we don't always have to have a permanent Food Kitchen or permanent Clothes Closet, but rather we need to be diverse in meeting the needs of our community. The community is continuously changing, and therefore, the needs will change with it.

Mayor Buck stated:

If a church did not do anything in the community, then the church is just wasting its time. I mean, it just really is wasting a lot of time, and it feels like if the church is not contributing outside the walls of that church then to me, it is not really a church. It is just a building where some people got a little meeting place where they go and meet, but church to me is outreach ministry. Asbury over the years that I have been here and prior to that according to the history that I am familiar with has always been that kind of church that reaches far beyond the little doors that we have that are small little church.

Question 3. What do you feel are the barriers that prevent church and community from coming together?

Dr. Turnage stated:

I think a lack of communication between the school and those trying to connect. Dr. Williams indicated, preconceived notions about the church and a misunderstood meaning of church. Mayor Buck stated, the community having an attitude that the church does not care.

### **Summary of Learning**

Of the responses returned, 58.33% said yes, and 41.67 said no. This indicates that Mississippi still has a majority number of African American churches that are serving their communities. This data seems encouraging; however, many of these congregations are merely serving themselves. The responding churches reveal that a majority 50% of the congregation are only moderately to little involve in the community, which also indicates that the church is mostly working within itself. Vital congregations must be a minister to the community and serve outside of its walls. Asbury's ministries go beyond the walls of the building but still have much to do to recover the full potential of the original call of the church.

Seven responses show that like Asbury, these churches were organized in the 1800s. This means that most of these congregations would have been formal slaves. The churches would have been chartered by the Methodist Episcopal Church and organized by missionary pastors. Similar to Asbury, some of them would have developed small schools for the teaching of not only children but adults as well. Three congregations share that first major ministry of the church was education. As we can see from the responses above, only one answered: "Do not know." They do not know the answer does not indicate that the church is lost in history but somewhat has lost a connection with an aspect of its past. The goal of this project is to contend that understanding the past can have an influence on the present.

The majority of the answers reveal financial challenges which come as a result of loss membership. When the church is not functioning in the community, it will lose its

connection to that community. Sometimes the challenges that exist are the ones we create for ourselves.

Another noted issue is filling leadership roles. A lack of leadership is a challenge in African American churches. There are not enough people to fill the positions. When there are few members in the pews, leadership tend to recycle persons who lead to burn out and become frustrated. The loss of membership, the lack of leadership, and the need for funds will lead to a decline and possibly a close of the body.

Ninthly one percent of the churches begin their ministry with less than fifty members. Statics from the United Methodist Church indicate that 90% of African American churches nationwide are less than forty people. These congregations have either not maintain large memberships or have not grown in more than 100 years. Asbury grew to 500 members in the late 50's to early '80s. The body has fallen to 398 members with an average attendance of 125. This is above the national average. A lack of growth is an indication of a loss of direction and call.

Overall, the data shows first that there are churches similar to Asbury in existence and vital to the community; secondly these congregations show signs of growth and decline, and third, many of them have moved away for the original call. It is a sure indication the African American church in the Mississippi Annual Conference is in need of restoration and renewal.

The Teacher and School Administrator data indicates that the majority of those who work in the schools are interested in the church being involved in support of public schools. Of those responding, 56% are not familiar with Asbury and the past impact, it has had on the development of schools in Holly Springs. This could mean a small

disconnect on the part of Asbury. Fourteen persons felt the church and schools should partner together to enhance the schools. Tutoring, volunteer support, fundraising, and one on one activity were a few suggestions for the church to consider.

There is a notion that a barrier to church involvement is that many students do not attend church and may not understand the intervention of those outside the school. There is a fear of the church invoking a particular doctrine on students. There is a fear of too many different religions, causing confusion. Precautions will need to be taken to ensure that no one feels forced or imposed upon in offering ministry that is designed to help. A small percentage of the responders think that the church should have no involvement in school-related activities. Overall, the survey taught us that the idea of working with the schools is a place to begin creating new ministries.

Asbury is presently working to open an afterschool ministry, which will be a great way to introduce themselves to the schools. The program called 3Ps Academy will be open five days a week and will provide math and science tutoring, the areas that have the most need for the students. Classroom teachers will have the opportunity to provide input and guidance so that those students who have the greatest need will be targeted. The academy was not a direct result on the work of this project but was supported as an example of the types of future ministries the church will develop. The afterschool program will utilize several retired teachers who are members of Asbury. These former educators are volunteers and have agreed to engage in not only developing the students but continuing education for themselves. The 3Ps after school program will serve as a great resource tool for teacher and administrators.

This ministry is only one of several to come that will help the church to reconnect with the community and schools. The afterschool ministry also helps the church to restore a portion of its original call to ministry, which was to provide learning to former slaves. The effort to implement this program is the way many congregations can restart mission and ministry.

The interviews conducted provided a great deal of help to us as we seek to develop a model of renewal. Dr. Irene Turnage stated that it is crucial for churches and schools to partner in order to bring completeness to those in school. She describes completeness as education and church, making the person whole. Dr. Turnage recognizes that when the two come together, the students gain the most from their social experiences. It takes the church and the school to help young people to become all that they need to be. She helped us see that when the two are not there, we get what we are getting today in the schools. The lack of church is not the major problem in the education of our students but is an essential factor in a complete education. Dr. Turnage having knowledge of Asbury's history, encourages the congregation to continue with their efforts to reconnect to the Holly Springs Public Schools.

Dr. Charles Williams has for years recognized the importance of Asbury in the life of the Holly Springs community. He sees the church as key to helping communities to stay in touch with the realities of social influences. The community needs education, food, housing, guidance, and protection. Dr. Williams is confident that the church should be a catalyst in helping the community with these needs. It is imperative that the church see their ministry as vital because ministry is their identity. Dr. Williams would like to see the church not only relate to the public schools but to Rust College. In the years of

the founding of the college, Asbury has drifted slowly away from having much impact on Rust. Though the church still is home to many of the faculty, staff, and administration, the church does not engage in direct ministries to the college. Only a few students attend the church while at the college, which indicates an opportunity for the church to consider. Asbury founding of the college in 1866 reminds us of the rich history and legacy to recover for today's young people.

Mayor Kevin Buck speaks of a time when he and his family joined Asbury. They were looking for a body of believers who were not only interested in good church on Sunday but excellent ministry throughout the week. They found what they were looking for. Mayor Buck reminds us that the church is not just a place of worship but a place where mission and ministry are developed and implemented. There are people who are looking for places of worship which are places of inspiration and support. Buck reminds us that when the church is working to enhance the kingdom, people will come. Asbury has proven over and over again that when outreach is prevalent people are drawn that effort.

The three interviews prove to us that those who are in public leadership are interested in involving the church in the community and civic concerns. All three offered support to aid the congregation in any way that would help to strengthen ministries and services to the community.

African American churches across the Mississippi Annual Conference are enduring similar declines as Asbury. All are not in the same condition as Asbury. Some are in a better position to improve while others are almost to the point of closing. No church has to close its doors to the community. All churches have the capacity to grow

and become vital. The church belongs to Jesus Christ, and with that said the Bible teaches “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, NRSV). The church cannot possess a defeated attitude if it hopes to have a future.

In this project, we have discovered that the church is needed and that it has something to offer the world. Based on the church data collected, the church may or may not be able to reach back and revisit its purpose and strive forward. The original call of the congregation can help to reshape its identity, but many groups cannot identify the original call of the church. Saying that the church cannot revisit its initial call does not mean that the body is not capable of restoration.

The church is the body of Christ. Jesus stated that the “gates of hell would not be able to prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). The idea of looking back only refers to searching for that which was lost that can help the body to move forward. Understanding the past is important but not necessary to grow as a congregation.

Our world is full of distractions that can lead the church astray. When the church falls into worldly notions, God’s purpose is placed on hold. Asbury, like many congregations, has fallen into a maze of a rapidly changing culture. Asbury was formed to provide ministries to persons of color and to educate them. The church must never forget that the need then is a greater need today.

The thesis of the project states that when Asbury returns to its first call to ministry, then the church would return to a time of growth and success. Now we know that there is no guarantee that growth will take place but that the possibility exists. What has been done is to draw feedback from various sources in order to determine which ideas best fit a model of renewal.

## Conclusion

Throughout the history of the relationship between God and humans, God has called on humanity to assist in the process of providing spiritual guidance. This spiritual direction is never initiated by humans but rather by God. With each distinct call, therein is an urgency for which God is calling the human to attend. God calls those whom God chooses and offer those persons the resources and tools needed for success.

From the Old Testament to the New, God as often as possible called individuals to Himself and His work. For instance, Abraham was called to leave his home and to head out to a position of guarantee (Gen. 12:1-9). Paul was "called to be a messenger of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1) and noted in his letter to the Ephesian church that God "gave a few messengers; and a few, prophets; and a few, evangelists; and a few, ministers and educators (Eph. 4:11)." These jobs were essential to "prepare the holy people for service, for developing the church of Christ (v. 12)."

Another example of the call was when Moses noticed a bush burning not consumed by the fire. Moses was drawn by the spirit to investigate the strange phenomena. As Moses came closer to the burning bush, God spoke to Moses and appointed to him a call of urgency.

Then Moses said to himself, Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't burning up. When the LORD saw that he was coming to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Moses said, "I'm here." Then the LORD said, "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground." He continued, "I am the God of your father, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, "I've clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I've heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. I've come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that's



full of milk and honey, a place where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites all live. Now the Israelites' cries of injustice have reached me. I've seen just how much the Egyptians have oppressed them. So get going. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." However, Moses said to God, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God said, "I'll be with you. And this will show you that I'm the one who sent you. After you bring the people out of Egypt, you will come back here and worship God on this mountain" Exodus 3:3-12 (CEB). The rest of the story is noted in history that Moses did indeed carry out the call.

Other examples of callings by God were Abraham, Gideon, the prophets, and the disciples of Christ. In all cases, God made the call, and all responded. In all acceptance of the call, God provided the resources for the success of the call.

There are times when the call is rejected, and the circumstances are different, therefore resulting in strange outcomes. Take the call of Jonah, for instance. Jonah was directed to go to Nineveh to preach the people there. However, because of his attitude toward those people, Jonah took a ship to Tarshish. When it was discovered that Jonah was in disobedience to God, Jonah was thrown overboard into the sea and eventually swallowed by a huge fish. For three days and nights inside the belly of the fish, Jonah repented and asked God for another chance.

Like Jonah, the black church has lost its direction. It has abandoned the call of God and needs a redirecting or a renewal. For the church to be renewed, they will need to revisit the call. The request was given by God, and God is waiting for the church to return to that purpose.

As Christians, we are all called to Christ, to follow and obey Him. Jesus made that clear when He said to His disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Lk 9:23). The call of Jesus is the ultimate call on our lives.

For Asbury to be renewed, it must recount the purpose for which the church was established. That purpose was education and providing learning to those who needed it. It is evident that the urgency for education still exists this very day. The information and data from the public schools of Holly Springs show a need for aid and support from outside groups. Therefore, the model for renewal is one that offers the vital church steps to a restored ministry and to return to a call that propels the church forward. The model gives the congregation a tool to consider in reconnecting with the community.

*Plan of Action; A Model for Renewal*

Asbury United Methodist Church is at a significant crossroads in its life. Perhaps, as at no other time, this congregation appears to be ready to discern and adapt for itself God's vision for its future. However, the church seems to be struggling for lack of vision and focus within its ministries. Using the leadership that already exists and refocusing that energy in ways that the Holy Spirit will lead them will awaken within this congregation new energy and vitality. A discerned Mission Statement describing the vision for the congregation and giving direction for this body of Christ will allow the entire congregation to move in-step together as one body rather than as three hundred single persons. Perhaps, it may also redefine the understanding of mission and ministry and join with the school system to again fulfill its call to ministry.

1. Congregation and Community Prayer: There will be time devoted to praying for the church and community. Small prayer groups will help to facilitate this phase.
2. Study of the scriptures: There will be in church and out of church Bible studies.
3. Pastor involvement and leadership: The pastor must be entirely convinced and dedicated to the plan. It will be helpful for the pastor to spend some time in preparation to give proper guidance to the congregation.

4. Congregation involvement and leadership: There will be a series of training for members and those who volunteer to serve as leaders. These members will make covenants, which will include the pastor to participate in various aspects of the plan.
5. It is connecting with the community: The church must re-connect to the community to acquire feedback that will inform the plan of ways in which to be innovated.

The efforts of a renewal plan are to bring back a church that is vital and serving with the power of God to a hurting world. The following model, in Ron Crandall's book *Turnaround and Beyond: A Hopeful Future for the Small Membership Church*, presents a plan designed by Howard Snyder that can serve as a high starting point to help congregations restore hope and mission. The program focuses on a spiritual renewal that begins in the individual.

1. Personal Renewal—a dramatic, decisive experience or simply a deepening that gives greater peace and joy. . . . Nothing can substitute for this. First, through the new birth, then through the deepening work of the Holy Spirit, God wants every son and daughter to know the joy of deep, fulfilling communion with himself.
2. Corporate Renewal—a dramatic spirit of revival sweeping the church, or simply by a gentle quickening of the church's life. . . . A renewed congregation is more powerful in God's hands than a collection of isolated Christians.
3. Conceptual Renewal—God gives a new vision of what the church can and should be. . . . Conceptual renewal comes when our models are challenged, and we are forced to rethink what the church is really all about.
4. Structural Renewal—simply finding the best forms, in our day and age, for living out the new life in Christ. . . . Any traditional form, structure, or practice that helps us be alive and faithful should be kept and improved. Any that insulate us from the fresh fire of the Spirit should be modified or retired.
5. Missiological Renewal—A church needing renewal is focused inward. A renewed church focuses outward to mission and service in the world. . . . Sometimes renewal actually begins here.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1989), 285–291.

But six important ministry areas can be identified, which contribute significantly to Snyder's five dimensions of congregational renewal. The six renewal arenas are (1) personal pastoral effort, (2) prayer, (3) special events and spiritual retreats, (4) Sunday worship and preaching (5) small groups, and (6) community involvement.<sup>7</sup> The church following the above tenets will find themselves growing and improving in community involvement and service.

The project suggests ways for African American congregations to move toward a spirit of renewal which is growth and a reconnect with its community. However, the project has also revealed that there are other aspects which need to be considered on the subject of renewal. If we were to do something different to obtain a purpose for the decline of the black United Methodist Church, two distinct issues come forth. The first would be to investigate the decline of all black churches and not just United Methodist. It would be essential to survey and interview various black church leaders to gain a clearer picture of the problems of the church that are common to all denominations. This project, for purpose of context, has only considered the African American United Methodist churches. Secondly, to research the effect of racism on the black community, this is very prevalent today. Racism has caused many difficulties for African Americans since the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. The unfair treatment of blacks has not stopped and has had a negative effect on the lives of millions of black persons. Whatever affects the person also affects the community of those persons. A closer look at the racism issues and events will give a clear image of how the church has had to cope with those barriers.

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<sup>7</sup> Ron Crandall, *Turnaround and Beyond: A Hopeful Future for the Small Membership Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 168-169.

As a final note to this project, Asbury has, in the development of this project, began to make progress toward a new beginning. When the question was asked, can we renew the work of the church in order to enhance the future by restoring our past, the congregation took a serious look at itself. Starting in June of 2016, the church has grown in its understanding of mission and ministry.

The church has renewed its Sunday school in the creation of two adult classes and two classes for children. Sunday school had become a concern for leadership but by realizing their potential to supply the ministry with interested leaders, the Sunday school has grown to over fifty people.

The church took a grave look at its worship services. Realizing that the attendance in worship had fallen off, the worship team worked to develop a new plan of worship. The plan would create a worship experience that would glorify God, encourages and informs all in attendance, and include and enhance community relationships. Liturgy was changed to reflect diversity in worship understanding that even in all black congregations; the worship had and could become one-sided. A new choir was established in order to involve persons who had not been included before. Each Sunday service has a different theme, starting with the first Sunday as the service of Holy communion. The second Sunday is community services day, where the congregation uplifts and recognizes various community groups for their contributions to the community. Third Sunday is wholeness and healing Sunday, where the churches anoint with oil and pray for the sickness of the entire world. Fourth Sunday is children and youth Sunday. Children and youth are encouraged to conduct the service and invite youth from the community to share in worship. Children' concerns are brought to the

church for information and prayer. Fifth Sunday is Unity Sunday. On Unity Sunday, the congregation emphasis the importance of unifying itself and sharing a common meal after service. By emphasizing the mentioned enhancements, the church has grown by forty new members since 2016. This number includes adults and children.

Looking back at the past and understanding the call to ministry is essential. God calls all God's children to a purpose which untimely serves the purpose of God. The church can be renewed only when the call is placed in the heart, worship, and mission of the believers of Christ.

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